

## **England Goes to War 1914-15**

Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements of the University of  
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## *Abstract*

August 1914 is one of the great pivots of European history. The crowds cheering the outbreak of war raise the curtain on a century of war, genocide and tragedy. Cultural narratives of the Great War have absorbed the values of every generation since 1914-1918, honing the conflict into a number of potent shared images. This thesis examines the period between late July 1914 to May 1915, attempting to find the roots of such a powerful historical and cultural belief in 'war enthusiasm'.

The thesis begins with a study of the days surrounding the outbreak of war. It identifies the widespread fear and anxiety that greeted the threat of conflict in 1914. Drawing its source material from, across the country, the chapter discusses how region and locality shaped the response to war. We can see how the nation looked back to the experience of the South African War as an example of how *not* to act in wartime. 'War enthusiasm' is reassessed and remodelled, representing an inward looking celebration of the community, rather than a bellicose desire for war.

The second chapter develops these ideas across the period from August 1914 to May 1915, with the emerging narrative of a 'regenerated' England at war. 'War enthusiasm' is expressed in charitable contribution and pageantry and a new unity of purpose that rejected the divisions of Edwardian society. Chapter three debates some of the tensions and contests beneath the ideal of 'war enthusiasm', encompassing the economy, politics and the growing awareness of the horrors of war.

The fourth chapter covers recruitment. Firstly, it interprets the recruitment meeting as an extension of the pageantry of the home front. Secondly, it discusses the extent to which the volunteer army was a symbol of the new, unified 'community'. Thirdly, it traces the way that English manhood was 'regenerated' to fulfil this symbolism.

Chapter five examines the anti-German riots on the home front in 1914-15, and defines the unrest as a continuance of pre-war meanings of collective violence – the symbolic exclusion from community. The sixth chapter details the East Coast bombardments of December 1914 and the first Zeppelin raids, revealing the extent to which civilians were subject to the 'realities of war'.

## *Acknowledgements*

A PhD thesis is a long and convoluted process. The historical period under consideration within this study is roughly ten months, while the thesis is four years in the making, with its initial idea as far back as 1996. A popular image might be of the lone scholar toiling away, but a project like this draws support and inspiration from countless sources. These acknowledgements recognise the 'team effort' that helped me get this far. If they seem expansive, it perhaps reflects the extent to which I am indebted to all the people who helped out. Of course, responsibility for the conclusions of the following study is mine alone.

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## *Introduction*

What, then, was war? No mere discord of flags  
But an infection of the common sky  
Robert Graves, *Recalling War*

August 1914 is one of the great pivots of European history. It hinges the vibrant expansion and progress of the nineteenth-century with the cataclysmic thirty years of war that followed. It saw the beginning in earnest of Europe's decline, the last gasp of an *ancien regime* of empires, monarchies and aristocracies. It raises the curtain on Hobsbawm's 'age of extremes', a harsh world where war and inequality overshadow rapid technological growth and medical innovation, an age where the nineteenth-century ideals of nationalism and imperialism are replaced by the modernist ideologies of communism, fascism and international capitalism.<sup>1</sup>

The date - no, perhaps more the *phrase* - August 1914 is inseparable from the image of cheering crowds. There is no standard photograph with which we can illustrate this; there are hundreds of pictures from all the combatant countries. Nevertheless, in the psyche of Britain, France, Germany, Russia, Austria and others there exists a generic tableau of 'war enthusiasm': young men, crowding a square in a capital city. They are cheering, waving, singing. They personify the break that 1914 symbolises. In their faces they suggest the purity, ideals and optimism of the nineteenth century. In their crowded anonymity, they anticipate the endless rows of white crosses or open mass graves.

Of course these are retrospective reflections. I write in the year 2002, a decade after the end of the 'age of extremes'. We are busy trying to find a name for our own age. Now passing out of living memory, August 1914 is becoming as distant to us as the Napoleonic wars were to our cheering crowds. Yet it retains an

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<sup>1</sup> E. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: the short twentieth century 1914-1991* (London, 1994).

awesome emotive charge. Interest in the Great War is arguably as intense as it ever was, and that interest is spread far beyond the academe.

### I - *The Rolling Narrative of War*

What we know of the Great War is not the untouched experience of the warfare that took place between 1914-18. We are not passive viewers of the Great War, but continue to be actors within its narrative, we continue to generate it. By *narrative* I mean the shared mix of myths, cultural representations, family and community folklore which constitutes our 'story' of the Great War, the account that shifts in the place when we consider our image of the cheering crowd. Each generation has re-invented and re-imagined the war. Thus we can see the Great War as a *rolling narrative*, as each decade adds new layers of meaning and understanding.

In Britain, the nine decades since the war's end have exemplified this. The cynical participant accounts of the war are products of the late 1920s. *Goodbye to All That*, *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer*, *Death of a Hero*, *Undertones of War*, the English translation of *All Quiet on the Western Front* were notable works of a great boom of war memoirs between 1928 and 1933.<sup>2</sup> The poems of Wilfred Owen, integral to our narrative of the Great War in providing phrase and imagery, only received their first substantial publication in 1931, forming a key inspiration to young inter-war poets such as Auden and Isherwood.<sup>3</sup> In cinema the American production of *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930) became as seminal an anti-war statement as Remarque's original book. Stanley Spencer, who served in the R.A.M.C. during the Great War, painted the resurrection of the dead at Day of Judgement as the rising of soldiers from their mass graves. In his idyllic landscape paintings of his home village of Cookham in Berkshire, a white

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<sup>2</sup> R. Graves, *Goodbye to All That* (London, 1929); S. Sassoon, *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* (London, 1930); R. Aldington, *Death of a Hero* (London, 1933); E. Blunden, *Undertones of War* (London, 1928); E. Maria Remarque, *All Quiet on the Western Front* (London, 1929).

<sup>3</sup> A small edition edited by Sassoon was published in 1920; cit. G. Dyer, *The Missing of the Somme* (London, 1994), p. 30.

war memorial stands usually at the periphery, sombre, admonishing symbol of implied death and mourning.<sup>4</sup>

Paul Fussell, a veteran of World War II, saw the First World War as a cultural catalyst, creating 'modern memory', transforming the way we see the world. 'The Great War paradigm proves adequate to any succeeding confrontation', becoming the only frame of reference to which we can understand war itself.<sup>5</sup> Yet the Second World War helped reshape the perceptions of the Great War; the identifiable ideological struggle of the 1939-45 'people's war' brought the more clouded motives of 1914 into sharp relief.<sup>6</sup> The prevalent image of the first war was the soldier in the trench. In the Second World War, the defining horror of genocide located non-combatants at the heart of the conflict. Amongst one photograph of the innocent 'lost generation' we can make out a young Adolf Hitler.<sup>7</sup> In Britain, the reconstruction of the post-1945 period was informed by the disillusion surrounding the betrayal of the 'homes-fit-for-heroes'.

In the 1940s and 1950s, a new generation of writers remembering their youth in the inter-war period spoke of the influence of the Great War. In Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited*, the character of Sebastian Flyte is weak and feckless, overshadowed by his uncles that fell in the War.<sup>8</sup> Their death at the front takes the form of martyrdom for Flyte's pious mother:

The men I grew up with – and her great eyes moved from the embroidery to the three miniatures in the folding leather case on the chimney-piece – were not like that. I simply don't understand it'.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> A Stanley Spencer exhibition ran at the Tate Britain from 22 March- 24 June 2001). See also J. Winter, 'Painting Armageddon: Some aspects of the Apocalyptic imagination in art, from anticipation to allegory' in H. Cecil and P. Liddle (ed.) *Facing Armageddon: The First World War Experienced* (London, 1996), pp. 854-878.

<sup>5</sup> P. Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford, 1975), p. 86.

<sup>6</sup> A. Calder, *The People's War: Britain 1939-45* (London, 1969).

<sup>7</sup> J. Winter & B. Bagget, *1914-18: The Great War and the shaping of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (London, 1996).

<sup>8</sup> E. Waugh, *Brideshead Revisited* (London, 1945).

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 153.

The semi-autobiographical hero of Waugh's *Sword of Honour* trilogy journeys from idealism to bitter disillusion as the war progresses, mirroring the experiences of the Great War combatant novelists.<sup>10</sup> In Anthony Powell's *A Dance to the Music of Time*, a twelve-volume cycle of novels spanning from 1914 to the 1970s, the Great War dominates the accounts of the 1920s, with characters wealth and status defined by the conflict. In *The Kindly Ones*, 1938-39 is ushered alongside a childhood memory of August 1914.<sup>11</sup> In film, as a rash of triumphant Second World War films dominated, *Paths of Glory* (1957), directed by a young Stanley Kubrick, portrayed the Great War as a Kafkaesque nightmare of brutal murder and betrayed ideals.

By the 1960s, satires such as *Oh What a Lovely War* simplified the bitterness of the inter-war writers into sarcastic anti-establishment rhetoric. As the generation that fought in the war began to pass away, there was an attempt to capture individual testimony, which brought more personal but increasingly generic accounts of experience to the fore. Television documentaries such as the BBC's *The Great War*, broadcast in 1964, or later oral histories epitomised this.<sup>12</sup> A fictional war veteran in Pat Barker's *Another World* symbolised this change in attitude:

As a young man just back from France, Geordie refused to talk about the war, and avoided all reminders of it [...] Then in the sixties, Geordie began to talk about the war. Over the next three decades his willingness to share his memories increased, and as other veterans died around him, his own rarity value grew [...] Helen [*a researcher*] was interested in the reasons for these changes, in the social forces that had obliged the young Geordie to repress his memories of fear, pain, bitterness, degradation, because what he thought and felt at the time was not acceptable. A later generation, fresh from a visit to *Oh! What a Lovely War*, the *Dies Irae* of

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<sup>10</sup> E. Waugh, *Men at Arms* (London, 1952); *Officers and Gentleman* (London, 1955); *Unconditional Surrender* (London, 1961).

<sup>11</sup> A. Powell, *The Kindly Ones* (London, 1962), pp. 74 & 254.

<sup>12</sup> For example, L. MacDonald, *Somme* (London, 1983).

Britten's *War Requiem* pounding in its ears, couldn't get enough of fear, pain etc. The horror, the horror. Give us more.<sup>13</sup>

In the eighties and nineties, TV representations of the Great War such as *The Monocled Mutineer* and *Blackadder Goes Forth* - though contrasting in dramatic intention - presented a similar and recognisable reconstruction of the hierarchies, the senselessness, and the grim irony of the Great War. The plaudits, and viewing figures, accorded the lingering shots of poppy fields at the close of the final episode of *Blackadder* crystallised the potency of the shared narrative of the Great War. Giles MacKinnon's adaptation of Barker's *Regeneration* (1997) powerfully evoked the effects of shellshock on men such as Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon. Popular assumptions of the psychological impact of battle derive from the 'war neurosis' suffered in 1914-18. Sassoon's ordeals at Craiglockhart are familiar to audiences raised on *The Deerhunter* (1978) or *Tumbledown* (1987), tales of the horrors of other wars.

The strength of the 'rolling narrative' is the way it has absorbed the concerns and prejudices of different generations and evolved into a symbolic series of images - rows of war graves, muddy trenches, our cheering crowds - which encapsulate the conflict and its meanings. The evident weakness, particularly for the historian, is the fact that the 'rolling narrative' discards images and events even as it acquires others: the rough edges, perhaps, that would undermine the power of the shared 'story' of the war and its impact on British Society. A few examples suggest themselves, one being the case of Field Marshall Douglas Haig. Haig is remembered as the archetypal 'donkey' that led the lions, a figure of hatred and ridicule and popular memory.<sup>14</sup> Yet on his death in 1928 he met not derision, but thousands lining the streets mourning his passing. This does not fit to our present day version of the conflict, it has been forgotten as peripheral to the Great War narrative. As Haig's biographer Gerard De Groot attests, he was judged by a different age to his own, as he continues to be.<sup>15</sup> Other examples,

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<sup>13</sup> P. Barker *Another World* (London, 1998), p. 21.

<sup>14</sup> See A. Clark, *The Donkeys* (London, 1991); also Geoffrey Palmer's parody in *Blackadder Goes Forth*.

<sup>15</sup> G. J. De Groot, *Douglas Haig, 1861-1928* (London, 1988).

such as the ambivalence that greeted the prospect of war in 1914, or divide between civilian and combatant, lie at the heart of this study.

As a historian born in 1975, I am far removed from the living memory of the war. The personal mythology of my interest in the conflict is almost as generic as our cultural narratives of the war itself. My grandparents were born in the 1910s – their stories were of the Second World War, with its own powerful myths and narratives. Yet the Great War was a fixture of my environment. War memorials, like those painted by Stanley Spencer, still stood in the centre of every village around Huddersfield, where I grew up. At secondary school, like so many, I encountered ‘the war poets’.<sup>16</sup> As an A-level student, an interest in ‘history from below’ particularly E.P. Thompson’s *The Making of the English Working Class*, led me to an immature quest to rescue great swathes of people from Thompson’s ‘condescension of posterity’.<sup>17</sup> Quickly tiring of ‘labour history’ at university, I nevertheless retained the idea that many people’s experiences were not served by the sweeping narratives of ‘national histories’ of the Victorian and Edwardian periods. In particular, the way key historical events – August 1914 always seemed the most appealing for historical research – were received outside the cabinet room, and more pertinently, outside the capital. There were crowds in Trafalgar Square, but what of the rest of the nation? Fired with provincial pride, I studied reactions to the outbreak of war in Huddersfield, a northern mill town rarely mentioned in historical research barring biographies of Harold Wilson and works on the Luddites. Discovering in the local press a wealth of information to differentiate the experience of local to the national, the idea for translating this idea to a larger national scale arose. The essence of Michel Foucault’s idea of history as ‘archaeology’ – beginning at the present and working back through layers of the past – seemed so appropriate to this study.<sup>18</sup> August 1914 was, and remains, so powerful a historical moment that the discussion of the myth detailed must proceed any examination of the era. As a historian I am without choice locked into the ‘rolling narrative’ as it develops.

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<sup>16</sup> See N. Ferguson, *The Pity of War* (London, 1998), pp. xix-xxiv, for a similar autobiographical account of the inspiration to study the Great War.

<sup>17</sup> E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London, 1963).

<sup>18</sup> An example of Foucault using ‘archaeological’ methods for history can be found in M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The birth of the prison* (London, 1979; trans. A. Sheridan).

## II - Community

In assessing the impact of war on different communities across England, it is imperative to discuss in greater depths the nature of locality itself. *Community* is an elusive term, often used without much deliberation over what it represents. A more considered definition is required for this study. *Who* makes war? A passage in *All Quiet on the Western Front* humorously addresses this complex question, discussing how a war starts:

Tjaden comes back. He is still worked up and joins in the debate again straight away by asking how a war starts in the first place.

‘Usually when one country insults another one badly,’ answers Kropp, a little patronisingly.

But Tjaden isn’t going to be put off. ‘A country? I don’t get it. A German mountain can’t insult a French mountain, or a river, or a forest, or a cornfield.’<sup>19</sup>

Tjaden’s meditations still remain unanswered. Benedict Anderson’s study on the nature of national ‘imagined communities’ suggests that community is a means of defining oneself alongside others beyond the parameters of a visible shared locality.<sup>20</sup> Yet even the visible shared locality of small scale communities are subject to the same processes of imaginary construction, and the characteristics that constitute ‘our community’ can differ from one member to another. The work of Anthony P. Cohen on ‘belonging’ further discusses the ambiguous nature of ‘community’, examining how it operates as a social system.<sup>21</sup> Community is firstly something relational - we are only forced to define and conceive of our community when we are faced with something different. As Cohen suggests:

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<sup>19</sup> E. Maria Remarque, *All Quiet on the Western Front* (London, 1996; trans. B. Murdoch), p. 144.

<sup>20</sup> B. Anderson, *Imagined communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (London, 1983).



[p]eople become aware of their culture when they stand at its boundaries. Such boundaries are not 'natural' phenomena: they are relational, they may be contrived and their very existence is called into being partly by the purpose for which one group distinguishes itself from another.<sup>22</sup>

These contrived 'boundaries' are a fluid method of defining our identity. We are not fixed within one community and can seek to set the 'boundary' to our community over many different imagined areas: in Cohen's words, within 'a plurality of contexts'.<sup>23</sup> Historians have been sparing in their discussion of community, finding such fluidity difficult in comparison to the grander narratives of class, gender or ethnicity. Doreen Massey identifies the imagined shared values of community as a 'deeply essentialist and internalist way of thinking'.<sup>24</sup> Constructions invariably fail to recognise that community is 'always hybrid', always changing and always unstable.<sup>25</sup> Joanna Bourke approaches the question in her work *Working Class Cultures*.<sup>26</sup> She dismisses 'community' as a retrospective construct bearing little relation to the reality of a working class experience. The influence of a myriad of familial and ethnic ties, coupled with economic uncertainty, ensured against any collective communal spirit:

Faced with interlocking and sometimes discordant networks, individuals chose to give their allegiance to neighbours, kin, friends and acquaintances on a more *ad hoc* basis. Their choices were restrained not only by limited alternatives and restrictive resources, but also by cultural norms; but these norms are not so fixed as to constitute a shared identity.<sup>27</sup>

David Gilbert, in his work on mining villages, has been more willing to accept 'community' as a theoretical tool. He examines 'municipalism', a 'set of ideas

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<sup>21</sup> A.P. Cohen (ed.), *Belonging: identity and social organisation in British rural cultures* (Manchester, 1982); A.P. Cohen, *The Symbolic Construction of Community* (Chichester, 1985).

<sup>22</sup> Cohen, *Belonging*, p.3.

<sup>23</sup> Cohen, *The Symbolic Construction of Community*, p. 15.

<sup>24</sup> D. Massey, 'Places and their pasts', *History Workshop Journal* 39 (1995), pp. 182-192.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> J. Bourke, *Working Class Cultures in Britain 1890-1960: Gender, class and ethnicity* (London, 1994), pp. 136-169.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 169.

about the character of the city, of urban politics and of citizenship'. Community is seen as a 'process', allowing the negotiation of a shared identity across social class:

In small towns with quite complicated political sociologies, where individuals were able to identify themselves socially on a variety of bases, such as religion, deferential relations to company or to local gentry, or as part of an organised labour movement, a sense of specifically local identity offered the tempting prospect of a unifying focus to local society and a new source of legitimacy to those with economic power in the area.<sup>28</sup>

This 'process' is continually contested. Gilbert's *mining communities*, for example, are recreated and reimagined by 'the political rhetoric of left and right' and the influence of regional identities.<sup>29</sup> The weapons of this conflict are symbolic. Drawing on Cohen's ideas, Gilbert claims that 'people construct community symbolically, making it a resource and repository of meaning and referent of their identity'.<sup>30</sup> In the mining communities the symbolism of the union banner offered 'a unifying element through which village life became established as community'.<sup>31</sup>

These ideas on community – the 'unifying focus', the attendant instability – create a powerful analytical framework in which to understand the transition from peace to war in 1914. The 'negotiation' of community, the questions of who belonged, who was representative was radically destabilised by the outbreak of war. A new ideal of community was created, constructed as calm, unified and committed. This ideal was celebrated at local and national level. The temporal 'boundary' of this community was represented by a contrived image of the immediate past. After 4 August 1914, Britain 'on the eve' was mythologised both as a sleepy idyll *and* as a nation torn by social and political division. The

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<sup>28</sup> D. Gilbert, 'Community and municipalism: collective identity in late-Victorian and Edwardian mining towns', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 17 (1991), pp. 257-270.

<sup>29</sup> D. Gilbert, 'Imagined communities and mining communities', *Labour History Review*, 60 (1995), pp. 47-55.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p 51.

latter was the most persuasive in the first months of war, the former the more enduring in our 'rolling narrative' as the decades past. If ever the 'tempting prospect of a unifying focus' was offered, it was by the demands of war in 1914. The desire to be included in this community, to contribute, to play a part was reflected in a developing system of symbolic display. Khaki uniform, a relation's name on a roll of honour, the black crepe of mourning all denoted inclusion and involvement. As Gilbert states, even as community unifies, it can be a 'set of exclusions and absences', and we will see these exclusions in the outbreak of war.<sup>32</sup> The young loafer in civilian clothes, the naturalised German and anyone unfamiliar were all without that mark of instant symbolic recognition. The negotiation of this community was contested through rhetoric, pageantry and even violence. It is thus ironic that our initial image, so often a component of a nostalgic innocence represents such a turbulent time of change and upheaval.

### III - *Local press and narrative*

In a study concerned with the regional diversity of the domestic war experience, one of the most important sources is that of the local press. Here, it would seem, that there is a day-to-day chronicle that reflects the outbreak of war without the inherent biases and changing meanings of the Great War 'rolling narrative'. It is clear that both national and local newspapers were a very important part of life in Britain with the coming of war. From the newspapers themselves in August 1914, there was the evidence of the printing of daily 'war specials' to meet public demand of war news. It became a boom time for the press. The circulation of the national dailies 'soared.'<sup>33</sup> The *Grimsby Daily Telegraph* proudly states that its 5th of August issue sold 48,000 copies, a newsworthy event in itself.<sup>34</sup> From various diary and autobiographical accounts, it was evident that people were buying newspapers, both local and national. Mary Coules, a young woman from Acton in London, recalls how '[e]very morning

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

<sup>33</sup> N. Ferguson, *The Pity of War*, p. 241-243.

there was a wild rush downstairs for the paper', and how in August 1914 her household took in five papers a day.<sup>35</sup> Charles Bell, in 1914 a sixteen-year-old office boy from Wallasey in Cheshire, remembered the stampede for the *Liverpool Echo* and other evening papers that arrived from across the Mersey every day, and how their stock was often quickly sold out.<sup>36</sup> Mrs. A. Purbrook recalled in 1918:

The first thought each on rising each day was usually "I wonder what happened yesterday". The sale of morning papers must have gone up enormously for quite early they were all gone and there were none to be had for love nor money. My neighbour would often send hers in to me in case I had not seen ours before it was carried off to town.<sup>37</sup>

The historian George L. Bernstein's rationale for using the press to study Liberalism in the Great War reflects how, in the absence of party meetings and speeches, the press became virtually the sole forum for party debates over issues.<sup>38</sup> The local press in 1914 did not just provide a purely linguistic site for the dispersal of news. It also acted as a physical site of news. Possessing the technology to receive war telegrams, the local newspaper office window became a new public gathering place for the latest news. The official contradiction to 'Amiens dispatch' was posted up at the *Cambridge Daily News* office, and crowds greeted it with 'the greatest enthusiasm'.<sup>39</sup>

The local press thus played a key role in 1914-15. But rather than using the local press to reflect *what really happened* in an unproblematic sense, it is clear that the press reports of 1914 give us something more complex than that. We have discussed how notions of community are fluid and relational, and must apply this mode of thinking to the output of the press. Patrick Joyce, writing on the nineteenth century local press, suggests that the papers 'represented the town to

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<sup>34</sup> *Grimsby Daily Telegraph*, 6 August, 1914.

<sup>35</sup> M. Coules, unpublished diary account, Imperial War Museum (hereafter 'IWM')97/25/1.

<sup>36</sup> Lt. C.G.H. Bell, unpublished autobiography, Imperial War Museum 92/13/1.

<sup>37</sup> A. Purbrook, unpublished diary/notebook, IWM 97/3/1.

<sup>38</sup> G. L. Bernstein, 'Yorkshire Liberalism during the First World War', *Historical Journal*, Vol. 32, I, 1989, pp. 107-129.

<sup>39</sup> *Cambridge Daily News*, 31 August, 1914.

the town'.<sup>40</sup> On one level this could mean the reflection of events, but can we not see the press in a more constructionist light? Robert Darnton and Daniel Roche's work on the print culture of the French Revolution treats the printed words as 'an ingredient in the happening' rather than a simple record of what happened.<sup>41</sup> The press must be seen within this light, actively speaking within a dialogue with its readership. To sell newspapers it must meet a demand, and while the paper can help shape opinion it must speak within a certain shared boundary of meaning. Therefore, the press was proclaiming an image of the town to itself. In addition, it was articulating this version of the town, to the country, to the empire, to posterity. It provided a 'story' of the community, a *narrative* of community. It was in the centre of the dialogues seeking to define and fix the boundaries of community. *What was being said* in the first months of war is therefore of paramount importance. In the light of the idea of the rolling narrative, the press can be seen not just as a passive conduit of events, but providing more immediate narratives of a community at war. The same process - the shift in meanings, the reinvention of the past - was occurring at a rapid rate as the press attempt to make sense of events. They are among the first layers of the 'rolling narrative' which we are still shaping today.

#### IV – *England Goes to War 1914-15*

The case studies for this thesis were chosen for a number of reasons. In an attempt to determine the impact of local economy on the response to war I selected Huddersfield as a centre of the woollen industry and Barrow as the home of war industries. Other towns selected for these factors included Cambridge as a university town, Grimsby on the coast and Aldershot for its garrisons. Alongside these dedicated case studies were locations chosen for specific events: Scarborough and Hartlepool because of the December bombardments, the towns that suffered the Zeppelin raids and the locales (such as Keighley or Crewe) that witnessed the anti-German riots. It seemed

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<sup>40</sup> Joyce, Patrick, *Visions of the People: Industrial England and the question of class, 1848-1914* (Cambridge, 1991), p. 42.

<sup>41</sup> Darnton, Robert and Roche, Daniel, *Revolution in Print: The press in France, 1775-1800* (Berkeley, 1989), introduction.

worthwhile expanding my research of these towns to engage with more general questions of the response to war in 1914-15. From this wide base of press material, there were many serendipitous locations thrown up by such towns reporting upon their neighbours, anecdotes from autobiography or letters or *The Times* publishing stories from the provinces. The towns featured in the study I would roughly term as mid-sized provincial towns, though events in larger cities and more rural areas are covered in many discussions.

This thesis begins with a study of the days surrounding the outbreak of war. It identifies the widespread fear and anxiety that greeted the threat of conflict in 1914. Drawing its source material from across the country, the chapter discusses how region and locality shaped the response to war. We can see how the nation looked back to the experience of the South African War as an example of how *not* to act in wartime. ‘War enthusiasm’ is reassessed and remodelled, representing an inward looking celebration of the community, rather than a bellicose desire for war. The second chapter develops these ideas across the period from August 1914 to May 1915, with the emerging narrative of a ‘regenerated’ England at war. ‘War enthusiasm’ is expressed in charitable contribution and pageantry and a new unity of purpose that rejected the divisions of Edwardian society. Chapter three debates some of the tensions and contests beneath the ideal of ‘war enthusiasm’, encompassing the economy, politics and the growing awareness of the horrors of war. The fourth chapter covers recruitment. Firstly, it interprets the recruitment meeting as an extension of the pageantry of the home front. Secondly, it discusses the extent to which the volunteer army was a symbol of the new, unified ‘community’. Thirdly, it traces the way that English manhood was ‘regenerated’ to fulfil this symbolism. Chapter five examines the anti-German riots on the home front in 1914-15, and defines the unrest as a continuance of pre-war meanings of collective violence – the symbolic exclusion from community. The sixth chapter details the East Coast bombardments of December 1914 and the first Zeppelin raids, revealing the extent to which civilians were subject to the ‘realities of war’.

## Chapter One

### *August 1914*

We have discussed at length the cultural resonance that August 1914 holds for both historians and a wider national psyche. Accordingly the events surrounding the outbreak of war have been well covered. We are not wanting in discussions of the diplomatic turmoil amongst the political elite.<sup>1</sup> If this extensive selection goes some length towards examining *why* Britain went to war, there still remains a dearth of analysis of *how* Britain responded during the weeks before and the months after 1914. The major historians of the impact of war in Britain are not to be admonished for this. The scope of Marwick, Wilson, Winter and DeGroot is too wide to afford any more than an opening chapter or two; they are surveys of the whole war, from a national perspective.<sup>2</sup>

Historians of France and Germany, most notably Jean-Jacques Becker, have examined 1914 in greater detail.<sup>3</sup> Becker's contention with the prevailing myth of war enthusiasm results from his use of a unique source. The government of France asked each schoolteacher in the first months of war to make notes on how communities reacted to the war on questions such as mobilisation and economic dislocation. From these valuable documents, Becker was able to map a diversity of voices and moods across the country. France saw 'much less enthusiasm than has often been alleged', particularly in the far flung areas away from Paris or the

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<sup>1</sup> A.J.P. Taylor, *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe 1848-1918* (Oxford, 1954); Imanuel Geiss, *July 1914: Selected Documents* (London, 1972); James Joll, *The Origins of the First World War* (London, 1984).

<sup>2</sup> A. Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War* (London, 1965); T. Wilson, *The Myriad Faces of War: Britain and the Great War, 1914-18* (Cambridge, 1986); J. Winter, *The Great War and the British People* (Basingstoke, 1986); G. DeGroot, *Blighty: British Society in the Era of the Great War* (London, 1996).

<sup>3</sup> J.J. Becker, *1914: Comment les Français sont entré dans la guerre* (Paris, 1973); *The Great War and the French people* (Paris, 1983; trans. A. Pomerans, 1985); ' "That's the Death Knell of Our Boys..."', in P. Friederson (ed.), *The French Home Front 1914-18* (Oxford, 1992), pp. 17-36.

larger cities.<sup>4</sup> Jeffrey Verhey has examined the German experience of 1914, and how it came to be mythologised both during the war and after.<sup>5</sup> Niall Ferguson has recognised the need to go into greater depth on the response to war in Britain, to qualify the ‘axiom of historiography’ that constitutes the ‘war enthusiasm’ of 1914. He provides a thoughtful chapter, which is clearly written to raise as many questions as it answers.<sup>6</sup>

This chapter offers a detailed examination of the immediate weeks surrounding the outbreak of war in England. As the strength of Becker’s argument derived from his awareness of the diversity of reactions across France, this study recognises the importance of the locality in shaping the response to war - and, conversely, the role of the response to war in shaping the locality. How did the onset of war affect a community’s sense of itself? Our constant reference point, perhaps, is the crowds thronging the streets in the capital cities of Europe. What was occurring away from the metropolitan passions? Did the capital cities reflect a national mood? And was London really as the mythology remembers it - crowds of people cheering the outbreak of war? From this point on my discussion focuses on events in England alone. The responses of Scotland, Wales and Ireland could not, I think, be damned with the faint praise as *regions* in my regional analysis, and deserve studies of their own, with reference to national sentiment and indigenous language. This chapter attempts to answer these questions, and reach a new understanding of the turbulent first month of war.

There are, alas, no sources comparable to the schoolteacher’s notes at Becker’s disposal. But there is the local press, which provided in many ways a similar service for the historian. In thousands upon thousands of words of newspaper text, the problems, issues, fears and viewpoints of communities are discussed and debated. As we have already seen, the press can be interpreted as providing not just the simple reflection of events, but a narrated *story* of the community at war.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Becker, *The Great War and the French People*, p.3.

<sup>5</sup> J. Verhey, *The Spirit of 1914: Militarism, Myth and Mobilization in Germany* (Cambridge, 2000).

<sup>6</sup> N. Ferguson, *The Pity of War* (London, 1998), pp. 174-212.

<sup>7</sup> This same reading of sources also, of course, applies to Becker’s schoolteachers’ notes.



In addition to local press material, there are countless memoir accounts and diary material to draw from. Again we must read these carefully. The memoirs of the politicians of the Great War era often tell us much more about the atmosphere of recrimination and disillusion in the twenties and thirties than August 1914 - a major part of our popular account of the response to war derives from their authoritative tones, the prophetic politicians rendered impotent in the face of baying patriotic crowds. The memoirs of combatants follow their own narrative structure. August 1914 is the moment of enlistment, the innocence awaiting the brutality to come. Less illustrious diaries and memoirs than those penned by Lloyd George or Robert Graves, typescripts and scrapbooks found in archives rather than bookstores, still have the same biases and ambiguities. Government records and police reports are also, despite their administrative stamp, sequences of testimony and comment - in short they too are narratives. What, therefore, the historian faces with August 1914 is an aggregation of stories. A collection of narratives may seem a somewhat unsteady basis to assess what is already such a powerful *story*, but the communities we shall examine experienced much of the war through narrative - a baseless spy rumour, the press report of a defeat, a letter describing a loved one's death in the field. These stories then influenced and informed the way they would act, whether to panic, to riot, to enlist. What follows thus is neither the 'the truth', nor mere textual analysis, but an attempt to evaluate the *experience* of 1914 through narrative. In drawing on this mass of words, we can speculate as to 'what really happened'. The chapter itself follows a familiar narrative structure, beginning with the July 'crisis' period through to the mythic 'war enthusiasm' around the declaration of war in early August.

### I – '*Burst like a bombshell*'

It is generally accepted that the war crept up unawares on the British in the summer of 1914. David Lloyd George recalled in the late thirties that '[n]ot even the astutest and most far-seeing statesman foresaw in the early summer of 1914

that the autumn would find the nations of the world interlocked in the most terrible conflict that had ever been witnessed [...].<sup>8</sup>

The domestic situation, with the Irish Home Rule crisis poised on the brink of civil war, dominated the press and made the outbreak of war almost a complete surprise. As Harold MacMillan wrote, '[t]he First War, in contrast to the Second, burst like a bombshell upon ordinary people. It came suddenly and unexpectedly - a real 'bolt from the blue''.<sup>9</sup> An 'ordinary' person, such as Mrs. A. Purbrook, a middle-aged woman from Hornchurch in Essex, wrote on August 4, '[j]ust a week ago I don't think that, in spite of the newspaper scares, any one of us, the uninitiated public, thought there would be war - and certainly they never really imagined that England would be in it. The final development has been most rapid.'<sup>10</sup>

Whilst the unprecedented nature of the war makes it easy for those remembering the outbreak as a shock, it is clear that the press, throughout most of July, saw no demand for news on the European situation. The assassination of Franz Ferdinand resulted in a few leaders in the press on the genealogy of the Habsburgs, and their tendency to meet violent ends. When a speaker at the Wiltshire Unionist fete stated on the 25 July that 'the fight so long expected cannot be much longer deferred', he was referring not to Germany, but the next general election.<sup>11</sup> With domestic politics in such turmoil due to the seriousness of the Irish situation, this is perhaps unsurprising. In England this matter was not simply a quarrel confined on the other side of the Irish sea; the large Irish populations across the country were an important minority at local level. In Bury a mass meeting in late July expressed support for John Redmond and the Irish National Volunteers in numbers.<sup>12</sup> July was also the month of the Orange marches, and the demonstration of hundreds in Barrow on 12 July would have

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<sup>8</sup> D. Lloyd George, *War Memoirs* (London, 1933), Vol. I, p. 32.

<sup>9</sup> H. Macmillan, *Winds of Change: 1914-1939* (London, 1966).

<sup>10</sup> Mrs. A. Purbrook, unpublished diary/memoir, Imperial War Museum (*hereafter* 'IWM'), 97/3/1.

<sup>11</sup> *Wiltshire News* (*hereafter* *WN*), 31 July 1914.

<sup>12</sup> G. Moorhouse, *Hell's Foundations: A town, its myths and Gallipoli* (London, 1992), p.43.

been one of many.<sup>13</sup> With this conflict virtually on their doorsteps, Ireland was understandably the primary concern of press and public in mid-July.

But perhaps it is wrong to overstate how little war was discussed. Much of the seeming unawareness may have been a feeling that the danger would pass, as the Agadir crisis of 1911 or the numerous Balkan crises of recent years had proved. It appeared just another continental altercation.<sup>14</sup> Mary Coules, a young woman living in Acton, writing on the war in 1915 remembered spotting a news hoarding bearing the legend 'WAR' in late July. 'I knew it could only be a declaration of war by Servia on Austria & I wondered at the time why the paper in question should have used such a startling headline'.<sup>15</sup> The lack of awareness of the public, in memoirs written both during and after the war, is accorded a grim irony with the experience to follow. Coules remarks bitterly:

Declarations of war all round - Russia, Germany or France. But John Bull drank his morning tea & read his morning paper as usual, with a "We're bound to do the right thing" expression on his face.<sup>16</sup>

F.A. Robinson, a businessman from Cobham in Surrey, recalled that the 'man in the street had been threatened with war so often that he was as optimistic as ever, and went about his daily work little dreaming what was in store'.<sup>17</sup> The diary of Frank Taylor Lockwood, from Linthwaite near Huddersfield, makes no mention of war until 3 August, and then not again until the 5 August.<sup>18</sup>

Sections of the press began to sound the alarm in the week before the outbreak. In Huddersfield, the liberal *Examiner's* editorial is dominated by the prospect of

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<sup>13</sup> *Barrow News* (hereafter *BN*), 18 July, 1918.

<sup>14</sup> G. Barraclough, *From Agadir to Armageddon: Anatomy of a crisis* (London, 1982).

<sup>15</sup> M. Coules, unpublished memoir account, IWM, 97/25/1. The quoted sections of the manuscript I believe appeared to be written in two sections, first in early 1915 and then later that year.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> F.A. Robinson, unpublished diary account, IWM. This quote is extracted from his prefatory note written in 1918.

<sup>18</sup> F.T. Lockwood, unpublished diary account, IWM, 96/52/1. Unlike Robinson, Lockwood's writing is from a conventional diary, not started in response to the war.

‘such a cataclysm which would throw Europe back nearly half a century and population’. Britain’s involvement does not yet seem inevitable; England ‘is in no danger of being dragged into the conflict by treatise of alliance’.<sup>19</sup> The *Cambridge Daily News* London correspondent remarks that the ‘anxiety in diplomatic circles here at the present moment is intense’.<sup>20</sup> Many looked to the capital for some guide to the nation’s feeling.

Yet the *Examiner* and the *Daily News* London reports suggest a lack of awareness as the major characteristic. The people have ‘refused to believe that the whole of Europe is to be involved in a blaze of warfare’, and there appears to be an ‘absence of prejudice on one side or the other’.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, the ‘most striking effect’, it was suggested, was the effect that the Austrian and German mobilisation was having on the staffing of restaurants and hairdressing establishments. The Cambridge paper wrote:

The ordinary man has heard too much about European conflagrations to believe in one till he sees the flames as well as smoke, and he certainly cannot get his household to take it seriously. Even the false announcement in one of the Sunday papers that war had been declared aroused little excitement.<sup>22</sup>

These reports from the capital may have been representative of English feeling leading up to the Bank Holiday weekend. In the garrison town of Aldershot, the press reported that the crisis had had no effect on the troops’ training.<sup>23</sup> But there were areas of the country where the more perceptive observer must have concluded that this distant ‘conflagration’ was more than just an episode involving Austria and one of their troublesome subject peoples. As one hundred and fifty Austrians set sail for Hamburg from Grimsby, the east coast town saw the crews from Anglo-German steamers being paid off. The Grimsby press apologised on 31 July to its readers that the absence of news regarding the situation at sea was

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<sup>19</sup> *Huddersfield Examiner* (hereafter *HE*), 27 July and 28 July, 1914.

<sup>20</sup> *Cambridge Daily News* (hereafter *CDN*), 27 July, 1914.

<sup>21</sup> *HE* and *CDN*, 30 July, 1914.

<sup>22</sup> *CDN*, 28 July, 1914.

<sup>23</sup> *Aldershot News* (hereafter *AN*), 31 July, 1914.

‘solely owing to a promise to respect the wishes of the naval and military authorities.’<sup>24</sup> It also noted that in nearby Hull, the fishing fleet had been recalled.<sup>25</sup> In Barrow, the officials at the Armstrong Vickers shipbuilders cancelled their holiday – the firm’s holiday week began on 5 August – whilst other workers were asked to leave contact addresses to return at short notice. They were recalled on the 5 August.<sup>26</sup> Mary Coules was in little doubt that something was afoot when her family left for their holiday in Worthing on 31 July:

At Victoria station we saw some hundreds of coastguards men - Naval reserve, I suppose - all with kit bags & straw hats... This was the first inclination we had of any likelihood of war. One of the men called out as we passed him “We’re here for the Germans”...

Mary’s father, a news editor at Reuters, had been gloomy since ‘the Sarajevo incident’. For Mary, the war ‘seemed to find an echo in our minds - I know I thought “At last!” for we had been taught at school, in magazines & newspapers that the War was bound to come someday.’<sup>27</sup>

That the outbreak of war across Europe fell around a Bank Holiday weekend in England was convenient for the economists in the Stock Exchange and the Exchequer. For the historian it makes assessing the response to war even more difficult. Would there have been *holiday* crowds massing in Trafalgar Square on the 2 and 3 of August regardless of whether there was a crisis? It is a staple of diplomatic historians that during the ‘crisis’ period all the major protagonists, from Kaiser Wilhelm to Sir Edward Grey felt secure enough to take their customary summer holiday. Did their countrymen do the same?

If ever a period in history had a meteorological symbolism, the ‘long hot summer of 1914’, heating national passions to boiling point, is one of the most memorable.

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<sup>24</sup> *Grimsby Daily Telegraph* (hereafter *GDT*), 29 July and 31 July, 1914.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 2 August, 1914.

<sup>26</sup> *BN*, 8 August, 1914.

<sup>27</sup> Coules, *IWM*, 97/25/1.

Yet the Bank Holiday weekend weather wasn't quite as feverish as the 'rolling narrative' would have it. The Trafalgar Square peace meeting of 2 August suffered a 'violent downpour of rain'.<sup>28</sup> It rained all weekend at Cleethorpes, but the sun came out for Monday 3 August, and the town saw a huge crowd of trippers.<sup>29</sup> In Wiltshire it rained all of Monday.<sup>30</sup> In the same way that the weather varied across the country, so did the holidaying instinct. In Aldershot, the excitement in the garrison town meant that few left for Bank Holiday, but the picture houses were packed. The 'what people say' column felt that the town had 'not been so animated for many years'.<sup>31</sup> In Trowbridge in Wiltshire, the streets were filled with people with a 'worried look' on their face, as many had cancelled their day trips.<sup>32</sup> In Barrow, the weekly *News* noted on Saturday 1 August that '[n]ext week will be the big holiday week in Barrow, and there is sure to be a large exodus from the town', and the thoroughfares were deserted on Bank Holiday Monday.<sup>33</sup> There appeared to be two options open to people on this weekend when the crisis was reaching its height. The first was to cancel, and save the money for the economic dislocation that was promised and in many places already beginning. The other was to carry on regardless. The businesses in the resort town of Worthing on the south coast were apprehensive about the holiday weekend, as some companies had withdrawn their excursions. Yet there were 'an unexpectedly large number of day visitors' on the Monday. 'This', the *Gazette* noted, 'seemed to provide Worthing with a record number of visitors, for the town was exceptionally full that day'.<sup>34</sup> Charles Bell from Wallasey near Liverpool, was sixteen years old in 1914. He spent 3 August at New Brighton, where he remembers that '[t]he attitude of the Bank Holiday crowd, might have been expressed by paraphrasing Drake's remark on Plymouth Hoe; 'Let us have a good Bank Holiday, and fight the Germans afterwards.' Bell remembers his father, whose moustache made him closely resemble the Kaiser, receiving curious

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<sup>28</sup> A.J.A. Morris, *Radicalism Against War 1906-1914: The advocacy of peace and retrenchment* (London, 1972), p. 414.

<sup>29</sup> *GDT*, 3 August, 1914.

<sup>30</sup> *WN*, 7 August, 1914.

<sup>31</sup> *AN*, 7 August, 1914.

<sup>32</sup> *WN*, 7 August, 1914.

<sup>33</sup> *BN*, 1 August, 1914 and 8 August, 1914.

<sup>34</sup> *Worthing Gazette* (hereafter *WG*), 5 August, 1914.

looks and comments during the day. When they returned home, Charles' wireless radio apparatus had been confiscated, and his father sadly shaved. War had begun.<sup>35</sup>

Thus the 'crisis' period in England inspired a diversity of reactions. Some followed the developing international situation with anxiety. Clues to the seriousness of events were more evident in some parts of the country than others. More, perhaps, were apathetic towards the distant nations of Eastern Europe, and thought this was another crisis that would just blow over. In this their view was shared by the political elite of Europe a few weeks earlier. Some were obviously fairly oblivious to the whole matter. By the Bank Holiday weekend, most anticipated at least a major conflict, with or without Britain, that would affect them at least materially. But many felt secure enough to take at least some form of holiday. All had a view of whether or not Britain should enter the war, which is where we will now turn.

## II – *Debating War*

Though we have noted the speed with which the war burst into people's lives, we must also accept that this did not preclude intense discussion over Britain's role in the crisis. If we return to our central image of crowds massing in the streets to cheer the outbreak of war, we must acknowledge that one of the biggest crowds before 4 August was an *anti-war* demonstration in Trafalgar Square on Sunday August 2. At the same time there were countless gatherings and declarations across the country against war. The newspapers were less than enthusiastic. Niall Ferguson states that on the whole, 'the press at first viewed the approach of war with disinterest or distaste'<sup>36</sup>. Gerard DeGroot notes that in August 1914, 'it would not have been the natural British reaction to intervene'.<sup>37</sup> But Britain of course did intervene. What were the issues being discussed in the period between the Austrian declaration to Serbia and eleven o' clock on 4 August? Did the

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<sup>35</sup> C.G.H. Bell, unpublished autobiography, IWM 92/13/1.

<sup>36</sup> Ferguson, *The Pity of War*, p. 216.

<sup>37</sup> DeGroot, *Blighty*, p. 3.

opinions divide neatly along party lines? Did the circumstances of locality shape the debates over intervention? Arthur Marwick claims that the 'opposition to war was striking, but no more striking than the speed with which the bulk of it dissolved'.<sup>38</sup> By examining what was being said in the 'crisis' period we can qualify Marwick's viewpoint to argue that the very nature of the opposition to war made possible the rapid transition that he details.

One might be inclined to assume that anti-war attitudes in July and August 1914 might be idealistic in character, anticipating our modern day humanitarian outrage at the conditions and consequences of war. Yet the arguments of opponents to intervention show that most objections to war were based in calculated economic spheres, rather than what might be termed 'traditional' pacifism. The language of idealism was claimed by those *in favour* of intervention.

Elements of a moral pacifism remained in some anti-war arguments. Respect for Germany and her allies lent a less economic tone to the anti-war voices. In the days following the Austrian ultimatum to Serbia, a common sentiment amongst Liberal papers, such as the *Cambridge Daily News* and the *Huddersfield Examiner*, was support for Austria's grievances. The *News* speaks for much of Liberal opinion when it suggested that '[n]o one will waste many tears over the castigation of a nation of regicides and cut-throats like the Servians'.<sup>39</sup> Sympathy for Germany, allied to the antipathy many felt towards Tsarist Russia, sharpened the argument against intervention to include a racial dimension. For the *Examiner*, 'Germany is a neighbour, and a kinsman too'. There was a far more deadly European dominance for Britain to object to than the 'Teutons' that horrified *The Times*, and that was 'the dominance of the Slav race'.<sup>40</sup> In Cambridge a petition of prestigious academics echoed the same sentiments:

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<sup>38</sup> Marwick, *The Deluge*, p.32.

<sup>39</sup> *CDN*, 28 July, 1914.

<sup>40</sup> *HE*, 3 August, 1914.



[We] regard Germany as a nation leading the way in the arts and sciences, and we have all learnt and are learning from German scholars. War with her in the interest of Servia and Russia will be a sin against civilisation.<sup>41</sup>

Yet this expression of fraternity to their potential enemy is augmented by the fiscal advantage that neutrality would seemingly guarantee. The Dons were clear that 'at the present juncture no vital interest of this country is endangered such as would justify our participation in a war'.<sup>42</sup>

It is this use of the word 'interest' that provides the basis to anti-war arguments in 1914. The root of the anti-war Liberal ethos was bound up with the notion of free trade. Seminal radical liberals like John Bright had, in the nineteenth century, balanced their moral arguments against war with considerations about the impact on trade.<sup>43</sup> The grandfather of the historian A.J.P. Taylor, a prominent Lancashire tradesman, spoke for many in his disapproval:

[He] opposed the War, as he had opposed the Boer War that went before it. 'Can't they see that every time they kills a German they kills a customer?' he moaned.<sup>44</sup>

By 1914, the principal arguments of the anti-war wing were derived from the writings of Norman Angell, whose tract *The Great Illusion* had proved the most influential pacifist text of the preceding years.<sup>45</sup> His central tenet, that the increasingly pan-national system of economic markets made war an irrational act to the detriment of any combatant's status, lent a bolster of economic reason to a less widespread moral pacifism. It seemed a proven theory; the role of the banks in averting the 1911 Agadir crisis would have been fresh in the mind of all Angellite advocates. Despite Niall Ferguson's ingenious reassessment of *The*

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<sup>41</sup> *CDN*, 1 August, 1914.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> K. Robbins, *John Bright*, (London, 1979), ch. 9. During the American Civil War, Bright procrastinated over support for the abolitionist north due to their reliance on tariffs, and the possible impact of a northern blockade of the South's cotton on Lancashire trade.

<sup>44</sup> A. Sisman, *A.J.P. Taylor, A Biography* (London, 1994), p. 17.

<sup>45</sup> N. Angell, *The Great Illusion* (London, 1911).

*Great Illusion* as ‘a Liberal Imperialist tract directed at German opinion [...] designed to encourage the Germans to abandon their bid to challenge British seapower’, it is the classic ‘Little Englander’ radical who made most use of it in 1914.<sup>46</sup> In the cabinet John Morley and John Simon used financial arguments to support their anti-war stance:

Morley and Simon argued that the Government should make an immediate declaration that in *no circumstances* would Great Britain be involved in war. They pleaded that their view was shared by a large and important body of opinion - ‘the great industrial centres of the North of England...the banking and commercial authorities in London, including the heads of the Bank of England...’ all were ‘adverse to any steps which might be construed into a resolve to take sides in the present dispute.’<sup>47</sup>

Even the bishop of Lincoln, speaking at Westminster Abbey on 2 August, hoped war would be avoided by the ‘tremendous curse’ it would inflict on our industrial community’.<sup>48</sup>

In Huddersfield, the economic arguments against war dominated the debates over intervention. On 30 July the *Examiner* editorial argued that ‘since the Napoleonic era nations have become so inter-dependent in a dozen different ways that even a shadow of war among the powers is enough to cause a financial and economic panic’.<sup>49</sup> The anxiety of the Angellites during the ‘crisis’ period was expressed in the *Examiner*’s article ‘War and Trade’:

What applies to Huddersfield applies in a greater or lesser degree to every centre of production in the United Kingdom [...] This sudden and dramatic decline of business should give pause to all who are ready to shout for war for the sake of war. If the outbreak of hostilities in a distant

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<sup>46</sup> Ferguson, p. 22.

<sup>47</sup> Morris, *Radicalism Against War*, p. 394.

<sup>48</sup> *HE*, 3 August, 1914.

<sup>49</sup> *HE*, 30 July, 1914.

part of Europe can destroy so much of the nation's trade, what would be the effect of plunging Britain herself into the greatest war in her history?<sup>50</sup>

George L. Bernstein, surveying Liberal opinion throughout the Great War, details how the Liberal press of Yorkshire was unanimously against British intervention.<sup>51</sup> It was not just an adherence to the Angellite school of thought that prompted this view. Fear of the economic dislocation that a European war, whatever duration and regardless of British involvement, would inflict on the woollen industry that underpinned the Liberal strongholds of the West Riding infused Angell's arguments with immediate material consequences. One war plan for Britain during the crisis period was thought to be based upon, and perhaps solely consisting of, a naval blockade of the central powers, whilst Britain pursued its existing trade unaffected with the Empire and the Americas. The diversity of trade interests in Britain made this a weak strategy indeed. The *Examiner* put forward the woollen industry's case:

[T]here is little doubt that trade with the continent, which represents a good proportion of the output from the woollen and worsted mills, will be virtually paralysed. Germany and Austria are two of the leading continental markets for Huddersfield goods, and the breaking off of commercial relations with these countries will be disastrous, while trade with France, also an important market, will be likewise cut off.<sup>52</sup>

Government investigations after the war showed, out of all woollen goods produced in Britain, the vast amount being from the West Riding alone, the nations classed as 'Enemies' counted for £9,447,000 of a total export revenue of £17,955,000, well over half the total.<sup>53</sup> Vital imports also came from the European protagonists. Germany provided eighty per cent of dyestuffs and 'practically the whole of the worsted yarns imported' originated from France and

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<sup>50</sup> *HE*, 3 August, 1914.

<sup>51</sup> G.L. Bernstein, 'Yorkshire Liberalism during the First World War', *Historical Journal*, vol. 32, 1 (1989), pp. 107-129.

<sup>52</sup> *HE*, 3 August, 1914.

<sup>53</sup> *Textile trades after the war* (1918), Cd., 7755, XXI, p. 66.

Belgium (ninety six per cent) and Germany itself (four per cent).<sup>54</sup> The fears became reality fairly quickly. The *Examiner* reported from the Huddersfield Woollen Market on 4 August that trade was 'at a very low ebb, and the outlook in consequence of the war is very serious. Practically all the orders on the continental account have been cancelled, and this will mean heavy losses, both to manufacturers and merchants'.<sup>55</sup> The woollen industry was not the only trade to share the same fears. At the outset of August, the North Sea was widely expected to host the clash of British and German naval might. For Grimsby, a town built around its fishing trade, the portents of war were not good. As the *Grimsby Daily Telegraph* predicted:

The herring season will be greatly affected by the outbreak of hostilities. Any herrings that may be landed will have to be cured and stocked and sent inland for immediate consumption as the continental trade is absolutely at a standstill. Quite three parts of the herrings landed at Grimsby are exported to Germany, Russia, Austria and other countries.<sup>56</sup>

For some local economies the advent of war was more of a boon. Barrow, home to naval shipbuilding and engineering was conscious that war meant expansion for their trade. Ten days into the war, the *Barrow News*, recognising the economic downturn across much of the country, confessed that 'we in Barrow are somewhat happily placed. The great works of Messrs. Vickers are extremely busy and working day and night'. Consequently the rest of Barrow's trade seemed to be keeping 'fairly well up to the standard of peaceful times'. Expectations of the nature of the conflict in early August play a part in these views - Barrow's prosperity 'naturally follows where a great *naval* war is imminent'.<sup>57</sup>

If the Liberal woollen industry was firmly anti-war both politically and economically, there was little enthusiasm for war in England from left or right. As

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<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> *HE*, 4 August, 1914.

<sup>56</sup> *GDT*, 3 August, 1914.

Ferguson shows, *The Times* was the only major newspaper to support intervention consistently from the earliest stage, and it would be wrong to imagine that the Tory and Unionist press clamoured for war in the way Lloyd George might have remembered.<sup>58</sup> Pessimism was the main tenor of the discussion in the right wing press, where the *Grimsby Daily Telegraph* was suffering from ‘grave apprehension’ in late July.<sup>59</sup> The *Barrow News* advised its readers to ‘pray for peace’.<sup>60</sup> The *Wiltshire News* considered the war as potentially ‘the most catastrophic hostilities since the days of Napoleon’, and felt that ‘[n]obody has anything to gain by the war’.<sup>61</sup>

But if the prospect of war were to arise, then Britain would not, it was clear, be found wanting. ‘We don’t want to fight, but by jingo if we do...’ was the refrain of a music hall song of the 1870s, and a similar spirit – if less enthusiastic – can be found in many of the arguments for intervention. Avner Offer discusses the role of ‘honour’ in the decisions to go to war in 1914. Offer detects in the German martial concept of honour a contempt for the ‘interests’ invoked by the Angellite view of war, the ‘ostensible inability of English-speaking societies to appreciate the attraction of war’:

The Prussian general Von Bernhardi, who articulated the values of the General Staff, expressed a view widely held, that German values were superior to the Western ones of “material prosperity, commerce and money-making”.<sup>62</sup>

In Offer’s view, Asquith and Grey’s justification for British involvement ‘invoked *interest* in the same breath as honor’.<sup>63</sup> But we cannot, of course, use the delicate political phrasing of the Liberal leaders – aimed at their own party as much as their

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<sup>57</sup> *BN*, 15 August, 1914, emphasis added.

<sup>58</sup> Ferguson, ch. 8, 212-247..

<sup>59</sup> *GDT*, 28 July, 1914.

<sup>60</sup> *BN*, 1 August, 1914.

<sup>61</sup> *WN*, 31 July, 1914.

<sup>62</sup> A. Offer, ‘Going to War in 1914: A Matter of Honor?’, *Politics and Society*, Vol. 23, No. 2 (1995), pp. 213-241.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

opponents or the nation as a whole - as reflecting the mood of a nation. Many, across the political spectrum, were accepting the *fact* that war seemed inevitable, and with this accounted for, saw the war clearly in terms of British prestige. The *Grimsby Daily Telegraph* was all for peace, and felt that war could be avoided.

But if that [*a diplomatic solution*] proves impossible of accomplishment, she will prove to the whole world that she stands by her word - that in fact in fouds weather as in fair, she is faithful to her friends. There will be no running away from her pledges - actual or implied.<sup>64</sup>

The Tory *Huddersfield Chronicle* supported Grey's efforts for peace, but a similar appeal to British honour was made. The *Chronicle* was determined that '[n]othing must be done, or anything left undone, that will imperil Britain's prestige [...] we must be ready and willing to carry out moral obligations'.<sup>65</sup> Those that argued for neutrality on the basis of commercial interests were an embarrassment. The *Pall Mall Gazette* railed against the 'sordid doctrines' of Norman Angell, in which the 'love for money bags sways the men of virile races above material gain'.<sup>66</sup> A speaker for the National Service League in Leeds on 30 July made it clear that '[t]here were higher things than concern for material gain'.<sup>67</sup> It was clear that such a view was gaining momentum. With the war just hours old, the *Worthing Gazette* was proud to hear the

deep tones of determination drown the piping voices of the very little englanders, of an especially virulent type, happily so few in number and so relatively insignificant, who affront the public conscience by the implied suggestion that international obligations should be deliberately disregarded by us at a time of the greatest possible peril.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> *GDT*, 30 July, 1914.

<sup>65</sup> *Huddersfield Chronicle* (hereafter *HC*), 3 August, 1914.

<sup>66</sup> *Pall Mall Gazette*, 2 July, 1914.

<sup>67</sup> *HC*, 31 July, 1914.

<sup>68</sup> *WG*, 5 August, 1914.

If there was a sizeable cultural resistance to war on the grounds of its economic rationality, backed up by a respect for German 'civilisation', how was it reduced so quickly to the 'piping voices' so derided? It is thus important to examine the process with which the anti-war mindset made sense of the 'crisis', and how the overwhelming number of people accepted the prospect of war.

The German invasion of Belgium became a major influence on all discussions over intervention. Mary Coules remembered in early 1915 that in the first three days of August, 'everybody was asking "Will England join in?" & we were beginning to dread that we should be ashamed of our country - or rather our government - It was the German invasion of Belgium, of course, that decided it'.<sup>69</sup> Andrew Bonar Law, the Tory leader of the opposition, had revealed to Grey a few days before the outbreak of war that even rank and file Tories would not unanimously support war without German intervention in Belgium.<sup>70</sup> The issue of Belgium could be shaped to provide justification for all that remained to be convinced of the need for war. For the diplomatic mind it was a violation of a treaty that Britain was sworn to defend. For the strategist the annexation gave Germany unrivalled access to the channel via Antwerp. For the renegade Irish, the courage of 'little Catholic Belgium' cooled the ardour of the nationalists.<sup>71</sup> For many more the 'story' of Belgium, a brave nation standing up to a belligerent continental bully, was impossible to resist. As Trevor Wilson states, 'the situation required an extra element of definition, a further injection of moral purpose'.<sup>72</sup> One liberal commentator remarked in her diary on the 9 August that 'German violation of Belgian neutrality was the rock on which all the anti-war feeling was shipwrecked'.<sup>73</sup> The dissenters that remained could be damned as little more than the shallow materialists that their critics had always claimed they were. Anti-war protests lost their moral edge, and thus their credibility. The Cambridge dons' declaration faltered. A letter for Professor J.S. Reid in the local press made public his intention to withdraw his name from the 'Neutrality League' list. Reid was

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<sup>69</sup> Coules, IWM 97/25/1.

<sup>70</sup> Morris, *Radicalism Against War*, p. 397f.

<sup>71</sup> Moorhouse, *Hell's Foundations*, p. 44.

<sup>72</sup> T. Wilson, 'Britain's "Moral Commitment to Belgium in 1914"', *History*, 64 (1979), pp. 380-390.

emphatic that 'the German attack on Belgium has made a profound change in the situation'.<sup>74</sup> An anti-war lecture by the Rev. Dr. Lawrence printed on the 6 August, is footnoted with a qualifying bracket, stating that '[w]hen this was written and preached, an attack on the neutrality of Belgium had not become imminent'.<sup>75</sup> The German intervention of Belgium provided a re-casting of what the war represented for those who had been less than eager. From the folly of allying with Tsarist despotism against German civilisation, the war was now seen as a defence of civilisation itself. Anti-German sentiment came to the fore. Germany's benign 'civilisation', of Goethe and Beethoven, was hastily rewritten as menacing German *Kultur*, epitomised by brutal Uhlan soldiers at Namur, or the burning cathedral at Louvain. By 3 August the editor of the *Grimsby Daily Telegraph* was clear that the Kaiser's 'oft repeated protestations of peaceful intentions were so much hypocrisy', and that Germany was really after Britain all along.<sup>76</sup> The *Wiltshire News* laid the blame of the war on Germany, and looked forward to the day when 'the wings of the German Eagle [were] ruthlessly clipped'.<sup>77</sup> George Thomson, the mayor of Huddersfield, was a man of considerable radical Liberal pedigree. His words, reported in the press from a mid-August fund raising meeting provide an example of how the radical came to accept the war:

He had a great constitutional horror of war, and he had to read and think a long time before he was reconciled to the justice of the present war; but he had course to feel that, in the interests of posterity, we must now get rid of the nightmare which had been over us for many years of the menace of the Germans and their ruler.<sup>78</sup>

Thomson's procrastination over the war aims and his late acceptance of a German menace, all delivered with an air of feckless fatalism, must have echoed the mindset of many in 1914.

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<sup>73</sup> Kate Courtney, *cit.* Morris, p. 410.

<sup>74</sup> *CDN*, 5 August, 1914.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 6 August, 1914.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 3 August, 1914.

<sup>77</sup> *WN*, 7 August, 1914.



For there was little the anti-war wing could do except search for a way to justify the war. We have already discussed the speed of events as a major feature of the crisis. The weekly local press epitomises the pace of change, with anti-war and pro-war addresses by the same speaker often in the same issue covering the first days of August. When Niall Ferguson notes that the *Lancaster Guardian* and the *Barrow News* were not convinced war was necessary until 8 August, it is due to the fact that they were weekly papers, and had no previous issue since 1 August. Systematically organised protests and resistance were impossible to organise in any depth. The hurriedly organised anti-war meeting at Trafalgar Square on 2 August was a passionate gesture of defiance, but already the crisis seemed too far advanced for it to make a difference. Liberal demonstrations in Swindon over the Bank Holiday weekend demonstrated the growing fatalism of the anti-war wing. On the Saturday, the chairman of the Liberal association was confident that the government 'must keep us out of the mess'. By August 2, the mood had changed. A visiting speaker lamented that there 'was not the faintest shadow of hope that England would not be dragged into the wretched and wicked war'.<sup>79</sup> On the night of 4 August, as the British ultimatum ran out, the village of New Mill near Huddersfield hosted an anti-war meeting attracting four hundred people. Its resolutions recognised the inevitability of conflict. The purpose of the meeting was for posterity, to declare that the village had done the best it could in resistance, but now steeled itself for the war.<sup>80</sup>

A.J.P. Taylor's memorable phrase, 'War by Timetable', implied that the road to war was unstoppable once the wheels of mobilisation began to turn.<sup>81</sup> In many ways this appears to reflect the experience of England during the 'crisis' period. Concentration on internal affairs and apathy over another international flare-up meant few considered war until the Bank Holiday Weekend. Then what could

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<sup>78</sup> *The Worker* (Huddersfield), 22 August 1914.

<sup>79</sup> *WN*, 7 August, 1914.

<sup>80</sup> *HE*, 5 August, 1914.

<sup>81</sup> A.J.P. Taylor, 'War by timetable' in *From the Boer War to the Cold War: Essays in twentieth century history* by A.J.P. Taylor (London, 1988).

they be but onlookers as the conflict burst upon them? This did not stop the debates over war, however irrelevant it made them.

Why was there this divide between the economic rationalism of the anti-war arguments and the appeal to honour of those in favour? Why did the left, both Liberal and Socialist, put more emphasis on Angellite notions, leaving themselves open to the 'money-bags' accusations of their critics? The answer can be seen to lie in deeper trends on the left, particularly with the more radical Liberals. Miles Taylor identifies in the late-Victorian and Edwardian left a fear of the emotional, irrational tendencies that the right and ideals of patriotism could inspire.<sup>82</sup> J.A. Hobson's theorising on 'jingoism' at the turn of the century was a classic statement of this view.<sup>83</sup> As we shall see, the influence of the South African War (1899-1902) was of vital importance in articulating the response to war from all political standpoints in August 1914. But the left required an irrational point of honour with which to acquiesce to a war policy, a 'necessary device for explaining their country's otherwise inexplicable actions'.<sup>84</sup> This could be Belgium, or simply the reinvention of Germany as a menace to civilisation. The speedy return to an emphasis on calm and reason, and the left's concentration on 'pounds, shillings and pence' matters *within* the war effort, suggested a continuity of radical thought throughout the crisis period and August 1914. The left was not locked in battle with a bellicose right wing spoiling for a fight. The prevailing mood of the right is reluctance to be drawn into what appeared a superfluous conflict. But with France and Russia ostensibly requiring aid, it became a matter of honour *and* interest over British intervention. What would Britain's status in the post-war world become if it held back, and deserted its allies in their hour of need? Germany's transition from kindred spirit and impudent economic rival to belligerent warmonger and sworn enemy was not difficult.

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<sup>82</sup> M. Taylor, 'Patriotism, history and the left in twentieth-century Britain', *Historical Journal*, 33 (1990), pp. 971-987.

<sup>83</sup> J.A. Hobson, *The Psychology of Jingoism* (London, 1901).

<sup>84</sup> Wilson, 'Britain's 'Moral Commitment'.

But these common themes of debate across England must be qualified by the regional dynamic of war expectations. The varied nature of trade in England certainly affected enthusiasm in debates over the war. The idea of British trade continuing unaffected with the help of the empire would have seemed ill-founded and ridiculous in those towns whose livelihood was bound almost completely with Europe's combatant countries. For those already of an anti-war persuasion that war seemed madness at odds with economic reason was a confirmation of Angellite, and much older, traditions of economic pacifism. Those who did not share such political views certainly shared the anxiety over the consequences of European war. Cheering in the streets was not perhaps the first activity on the minds of those involved in the threatened industries. Having to roam the streets after being turned out of a job was a different prospect altogether, and has serious implications for notions of 'war enthusiasm', which we shall now examine.

### III – Rethinking 'War Enthusiasm'

One of the key components of the *rolling narrative* of the Great War is the cheering crowd in the streets. 'War enthusiasm', the paradoxical swell of warlike passion and youthful innocence, raises an evocative curtain on the cataclysm to come. Members of the British government, remembering the war in the twenties and thirties, are unequivocal in stressing the strident enthusiasm of the nation. In many instances the wild crowds are seen to have swept away any hesitation or debate on the part of those in power. Winston Churchill was at the Admiralty buildings on the night of August 4, as the British ultimatum to Germany ran out:

Along the Mall from the direction of the Palace the sound of an immense concourse singing 'God Save the King' floated in. On this deep wave there broke the chimes of Big Ben [...]<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> W. Churchill, *The World Crisis 1911-1918* (London, 1923), Vol. I, p. 144.

Churchill wrote in the early twenties. A decade later, in David Lloyd George's memoirs, the crowd outside the halls of state are dragging the impotent government into the abyss of war:

The populace caught the war fever [...] In every capital they clamoured for war [...] The elder statesmen did their feckless best to prevent war, whilst the youth of rival countries were howling impatiently at the their doors for immediate war.<sup>86</sup>

Yet we have seen in the preceding discussion that 'enthusiasm' for war through much of the 'crisis' period was patchy and unpronounced. Feelings about the war ran the gamut of emotions from blank apathy through stoic resolve to outright pessimism. There is little evidence of joy, and even less of an aggressive 'howling' for war before the 4 August. Miles away from Whitehall, Robert Roberts' account of reactions in Salford is very different:

The fourth of August 1914 caused no great burst of patriotic fervour among us. Little groups, men and women together (unusual, this), stood talking earnestly in the shop or at the street corner, stunned a little by the enormity of events.<sup>87</sup>

Roberts, is of course a product of the *rolling narrative* as much as the metropolitan politicians. He wrote in the sixties and seventies, when his left wing cynicism was informed by much of the anti-establishment rhetoric that had addressed the war in those decades. Yet his account resonates more with contemporary press accounts than those of Lloyd George or Churchill. As we shall see, crowds appeared in the streets in many towns across Britain. However, to assume they were of the intimidating, warlike manner of Lloyd George's memory is incorrect. The crowds of 1914 possessed many different emotions. Curiosity, apprehension, excitement and hedonism all played a more important

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<sup>86</sup> D. Lloyd George, *War Memoirs* (London, 1933), Vol. I, p. 39.

<sup>87</sup> R. Roberts, *The Classic Slum: Salford Life in the First Quarter of the Century* (Manchester, 1971), p. 186.

role than jingoistic sentiment. We must also consider the way the crowds were represented in the press. Were they considered in a positive or negative light? Why was this so? Finally, we must examine the term 'enthusiasm'. What, in 1914, people were enthusiastic about? What was the enthusiasm for?

As we have discussed, August 1914 is symbolically seen as the bridge of events. What is important, when examining the brief but crucial period under consideration, is not wholly to confine oneself to the events and attitudes that *followed* 1914. August 4, 1914, is not the beginning of the *rolling narrative* of the Great War. There was a distinct consciousness of participating in a historic series of events in the days surrounding the declaration of war - we can recognise the repeated concern with 'posterity', and how it will view everything from national to personal intervention, or non-intervention. As F.A. Robinson remarked in mid-August, '[w]e seem to be "living in a history book"'.<sup>88</sup> But people and communities looked *backwards* from 1914 as well as forward. The memory of the South African War, a decade and a half earlier, is a constant presence and influence in the press on how to act, and how not act. This has important implications for our reading of 'war enthusiasm' in the press.

How should communities act in war? In 1914 the first aim was to keep calm. Panic under pressure would not be befitting of such a nation as Britain. 'Business as usual', the phrase popularised by Lloyd George, encapsulated this idea. Expectations of the nature of the conflict played a role in this call for calm. Many believed, in the early days of the war, that the major battles of the war would be at sea, where the unquestioned dominance of the navy would see Britain through. When it became evident there would be large land battle, this was thought of in Napoleonic terms rather than the war of attrition it became - one decisive battle, admittedly bloody, but brief. With these predictions in mind, it was better that everyday life should retain its composure. Alongside this call for calm was a clear sense that this historic war, with a state as large and powerful as Germany, would be a stern test. It would require a pulling together, a unity of the classes and

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<sup>88</sup> Robinson, IWM, diary entry for 16 August, 1914.

masses that had seemed so distant in Edwardian Britain. This unity would be borne out of discipline and self-sacrifice.

The twin aims of calm and unity, as it became increasingly clear, sat uneasily together. Retaining the calm of the everyday made heroic self-sacrifice difficult to sustain. 'Business as usual', for example, retained the profit motive.

Shopkeepers, faced with an increased cost of materials, followed the usual rules of supply and demand and accordingly raised their prices. With economic downturn particularly hitting those who bought foodstuffs on a day-to-day basis, the moneyed stocked panic provisions. 'Business as usual' seemed set to achieve the opposite. The vision of a unified nation closing ranks to fight a worthy foe began to blur at the edges. The tensions between calm and unity ran throughout the first months of the war.

Yet these paradoxical virtues were doggedly championed in the press, as the community defined itself and its actions against its conduct in the last war. The South African War was a campaign notorious for its lack of either calm or unity. Calm was the opposite of the hysteria of Mafeking Night, the opposite of the Jingo crowds. As far as unity went, the conflict was not one of common consent. The violence and divisions that permeated the politics of the war were epitomised by the bitter general election of 1900.<sup>89</sup> The dishonour and Imperial excess of 1900 had the feel of a lost age in 1914. The monarch and the government were different. The Unionist administration of the Boer War had been routed in 1906 by a radical government of Liberals who had in many cases opposed the war, and who still sat in power. How did the memory of a war of fifteen years previous impact on attitudes in 1914?

The local press, in many instances, seemed satisfied that communities were remaining calm. Yet there is a didactic nature to their accounts - they were providing guides on *how* to act, as well as reporting how people were acting. The

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<sup>89</sup> See P. Clarke, *Liberals and Social Democrats* (Cambridge 1978); Also S. Koss (ed.) *The Pro-Boers: The anatomy of an antiwar movement* (Chicago, 1973).

*Grimsby Daily Telegraph*'s 'Town Talk' column reported on 4 August, with war imminent:

It is comforting at the present crisis to find that there is no panic locally. Of course, people are worried, but nobody is "panicky". We all know things are serious enough, but no good will come of losing our heads and going about shrieking.<sup>90</sup>

In Peterborough, the press stated that the city is 'absorbed by the war, yet it is quiet and cheerful. The announcement of war being declared against Germany has created no increase of excitement'.<sup>91</sup> The *Huddersfield Examiner*, reflecting on the first few days of war, celebrated the triumph of 'quiet determination' over 'flag waving militarism'.<sup>92</sup> In Cambridge, the *Daily News* reminded readers that '[w]hat we who remain at home must do is to keep our heads', claiming the Bank Holiday behaviour as 'altogether the most gratifying evidence of national steadiness at a time when the teeth of Europe have been set badly on edge'.<sup>93</sup> The paper's London correspondent echoed the reassuring tone the following day. Despite the state of war, 'the busy hive of the metropolis has not allowed itself to be perturbed into anything approaching a feverish excitement'.<sup>94</sup>

In addition this admirable steadiness of disposition, the press also spoke of the unified front the nation was presenting. As the war began to seem inevitable, appeals to patriotism above party became frequent, a continuation of the 'honour over interests' debates that had dominated arguments over intervention. The challenge of war required a unity of action unspoilt by party rivalries, from the cabinet room to the village hall. The London correspondent of the *Barrow News* remarked favourably on 1 August on the spirit of unity at Westminster after the party strife over Home Rule.<sup>95</sup> The *Sheffield Telegraph*, accepting the prospect

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<sup>90</sup> *GDT*, 4 August, 1914.

<sup>91</sup> *Peterborough Citizen* (hereafter *PC*), 5 August, 1914.

<sup>92</sup> *HE*, 10 August, 1914.

<sup>93</sup> *CDN*, 4 August, 1914.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 5 August, 1914.

<sup>95</sup> *BN*, 1 August, 1914.

of war, declared that 'we are Britishers first, and politicians afterwards'.<sup>96</sup> A letter to the *Cambridge Daily News* called for unity, 'and then we shall have found in this terrible trial something that no years of peace seem able to give us, the secret of how to unite the classes in England'.<sup>97</sup> For the *Worthing Gazette* on 5 August, after the careful decision of intervention, there was stern, considered resolution to see things to a finish. 'To-day finds the British Empire one in heart and intention, calm and profoundly assured, and with no visible sign of unworthy exultation'.<sup>98</sup> The divisions of party are rendered crude and inappropriate. The Unionist press was often more supportive of Grey and Asquith than staunch Liberal papers like the *Huddersfield Examiner*, who could not hide their disappointment. On the 5 August the paper encouraged unity behind the government, but looked back to longer term mistakes by the leadership:

There are others, who, admitting that war may sometimes be necessary, believe that with a different - a less anti-German - policy on the part of this country a few years back, this war might have been avoided.<sup>99</sup>

For Unionist papers like the *Wiltshire News*, endorsement of the incumbent government was a necessity of the grave situation, to which Britain was responding splendidly:

Here in the British Isles the voice of party politics is hushed in the face of the country's danger. All parties stand undivided in support of the Government, for whose handling of the business there is nothing but approval.<sup>100</sup>

The prevailing mood was of pride at the controlled determination the nation was showing. The press was articulating a version of events, constructing a 'story', or narrative, of the response to war.

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<sup>96</sup> *Sheffield Telegraph*, 2 August, 1914.

<sup>97</sup> *CDN*, 5 August, 1914.

<sup>98</sup> *WG*, 5 August, 1914.

<sup>99</sup> *HE*, 5 August, 1914.

<sup>100</sup> *WN*, 7 August, 1914.



How, then would the press interpret examples of the crowds in the streets? How does this affect historically assessing 'war enthusiasm' in August 1914? The memory of the 'mafficking' crowds of the South African War, and the anxiety over people remaining calm means that the press, if anything, *downplay* the enthusiasm of crowds. The London correspondents of provincial papers reported that the crowds in the capital were patriotic, but still well composed and ordered. On 4 August, the *Cambridge Daily News* commented that 'the crowds at the great termini manifested nothing in the nature of gloominess or any tendency in the direction of exaggerated excitement'.<sup>101</sup> The following day the writer was still convinced that 'exaggerated excitement was not a feature of the crowds:

It would be quite untrue to say that there was any war fever in London. The crowds in the streets are great - as great as they were at the time of the declaration of the Boer War. But the temper is really quite different [...] the people were not excited or demonstrative, but they were intensely interested.

Men carrying placards bearing the legend 'Why War?' were able to parade 'unmolested', and only children, it seemed, felt patriotic enough to purchase the little union jacks on sale.<sup>102</sup> Upon the declaration of war crowds were seen to demonstrate patriotism, but the spectre of 1900, still informed the description:

The gathering and demonstrations of crowds in the West end have been described as "mafficking". That is not a just description. When "B-P's" force was relieved London went mad and indulged in an orgy which, while it was spontaneous and touched all classes, and pervaded even the furthest suburbs, had many discreditable features. On Tuesday night there was a

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<sup>101</sup> *CDN*, 4 August, 1914.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 5 August, 1914.

certain amount of rowdyism, but it was not by any means of the same character.<sup>103</sup>

Neither were all provincial descriptions of the metropolitan response to the declaration of war positive in expressing its sobriety and purpose. The *Barrow News* London correspondent reported that the thoroughfares of London were ‘thronged’. But in his view, striking workers or ‘loafers’ formed the crowd. A week later the writer apologised, after evidence that the ‘idlers’ had all enlisted.<sup>104</sup>

For the crowds outside the capital, the massing of crowds were seen in more sympathetically, usually as a symbol of the town’s commitment to the cause. Jean-Jacques Becker’s work has revealed how the prevailing response to war in rural France was of concern and fear, rather than vibrant celebration.<sup>105</sup> In the moderate-sized provincial towns in England, concern and fear were certainly present. Around the news of declaration there was an inconsistent range of reactions. There seems to be little evidence of the ‘howling for war’ that Lloyd George remembered. We must consider that the crowds possessed an amalgam of intentions and moods. There was undoubtedly excitement and some ‘rowdyism’. Yet we must ask how much was related to ‘howling for war’, or an immediate response to the novelty of the situation, the exhilaration of the upheaval the war represented. The need to know news of the war was also a cause of the massing of crowds. Interest in the war was not synonymous with support or pleasure for the prospect.

Some areas did see examples of patriotic celebration. In Worthing, scenes of ‘remarkable enthusiasm’ occurred at the bandstand on 4 August, and after a national anthem sung with ‘great fervour’, the cheering could be heard in the offices of the *Gazette*.<sup>106</sup> Mary Coules was there, and clearly felt the excitement of the situation:

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<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 6 August, 1914.

<sup>104</sup> *BN*, 8 August and 15 August, 1914.

<sup>105</sup> Becker, ‘“That’s the Death Knell of Our Boys...”’, p. 29.

We were listening to the band [*in Worthing*] on the night of August 4<sup>th</sup> – there was a queer, subdued flutter of excitement among the crowd, & we youngsters guessed that something important had happened. The band struck up – for the first time – the National Anthems of the Allies, except the Belgian, which nobody knew. At the close of “God Save the King” there was an outburst of cheering, & caps thrown into the air. We raced home to learn the news, which was contained in a single headline. British Ultimatum to Germany – to expire at midnight. So it was decided. And that night we discussed the future of the world in the lighthearted spirit of youth, never dreaming what it would mean to this dear England of ours.<sup>107</sup>

People more eager for news gathered around the *Gazette* office, waiting for the arrival of more news by telegraph. They remained after the ultimatum expired, until the office workers had to ‘announce the uncertainty of receiving anything further’.<sup>108</sup> The *Barrow News* published three photographs of crowd scenes from the four days since the declaration of war.<sup>109</sup> The paper declared:

[t]his has been a week of excitement, thrills and sensations. The war has been the one subject of discussion. It has been talked of in all manner of places – in the public streets, the railway train, the tram car, in the city or at the seaside’.<sup>110</sup>

Interest in any hint of ‘the military element’, meant a gathering of people. The biggest gathering was on the night following the declaration, with the streets thronged with people. ‘No one seemed to know what they were there for. They were simply present to witness any objects of military interest, and although they had a long wait, they were eventually rewarded’ with some territorials, who were cheered heartily.<sup>111</sup> The war was ‘the one topic of conversation’ in the crowd,

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<sup>106</sup> *WG*, 5 August, 1914.

<sup>107</sup> Coules, IWM 97/25/1.

<sup>108</sup> *WG*, 5 August, 1914.

<sup>109</sup> *BN*, 8 August 1914.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*

which was described as ‘good humoured’. The gathering showed, in the opinion of the *Barrow News*, that ‘if various bodies who have visited the town are ever called into action in the present campaign, they will have the fullest and sincerest sympathy of the local public’.<sup>112</sup> There was little of the warlike nature of popular myth in these accounts. The crowds seemed more a mixture of the excited and the curious.

Other places were less conspicuous in their celebration. Whereas many memoirs of the Great War use enthusiasm for the outbreak of war as a device to contrast with what follows, Vera Brittain’s account of the night of the declaration in Buxton is very different. After joining ‘the excited little group’ who gathered to watch ‘local worthies’ donning their territorial uniforms, Brittain walked home, finding ‘the Pavilion Gardens deserted, and a depressed and very much diminished band playing lugubriously to rows of empty chairs’.<sup>113</sup> There were men that ‘rose and cheered very enthusiastically’ when word reached Huddersfield of the declaration. But the territorials who passed through the town the same night were met with silent crowds.<sup>114</sup> In Grimsby, the press reported great excitement and large crowds in nearby York, but, apart from intense interest in a local Russian thought to be a German spy, thoughts were with the fishing fleet still out on the North Sea.<sup>115</sup> Similarly, Peterborough was ‘absorbed’ by the war, but the declaration of war ‘created no increase of excitement’. Anxieties centred instead around the prospect of food shortages.<sup>116</sup>

#### IV – Conclusion

The ‘crisis’ period of July and August 1914 was conspicuous by the speed in which events progressed. In a matter of days, the prospect of war erupted on an unsuspecting populace. First reactions were muted, reflecting long term attitudes to European intervention. The impact of war on the economy, local and national,

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<sup>113</sup> V. Brittain, *Testament of Youth: An autobiographical study of the years 1900-1925* (London, 1933), p. 98.

<sup>114</sup> *HE*, 5 August, 1914.

<sup>115</sup> *GDT*, 5 August, 1914.

would be catastrophic. The German invasion of Belgium dissipated opposition to war. For the strategically minded it was a definite blow against British interests. On a much larger scale, it was an identifiable moral *cause* that the whole nation could understand. The motives behind the behaviour of crowds in early August 1914 are difficult to assess. We have examined why the press might report on the crowds in a way that understates their patriotic fervour. But we have also accepted that attitudes to war preceding the declaration were far from positive. In addition, those who supported war did so in a mood of necessity: for the defence of Belgium, or from notions of 'honour' or 'civilisation'. The expectations of what form the war would take also affected views on the conflict. The immediate prospect for most was not, they thought, a war they would necessarily take part in as combatants. There was an early rash of invasion fears, as we shall see, but the importance of the navy in many people's minds made war at sea the major expectation in early August. War would affect them through an instant dislocation of material conditions, which in many cases had already begun. That these would invariably entail hardship and uncertainty would fire few with unguarded fervour about the war. Solace was to be found in the themes of self-sacrifice, and the hope that the war might act to heal the divisions that had racked Edwardian society. From this idea, what can be called 'war enthusiasm' develops. It was an enthusiasm directed *inwards*, at the nation and the community itself, rather than outwards towards continental war with Germany. This enthusiasm began *after* the declaration of war, as communities found themselves facing the demands of mobilisation, economic disruption and the developments overseas. As we shall discuss in the following chapter, the narratives of communities-at-war were being constructed within days. A key component of this was the shedding of internal strife in the shadow of a greater enemy. We begin to see that one aspect of 'war enthusiasm' is enthusiasm for the deliverance from the turbulent peace of the summer of 1914.

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<sup>116</sup> PC, 5 August, 1914.

## Chapter Two

### *'Settling Down' to War*

In many ways this study is a record of moments. Moments experienced, such as a bombardment or a riot, and moments remembered, like the declaration of war or the rush to the colours. Yet, as the diaries and newspapers remind us, the war was lived day to day. Recruits faced the long weeks of training between volunteering and going 'over the top', civilians worked through the months following heady August days. The mythic 'rolling narrative' of war gives us little of these details, drawing its power from a brief medley of powerful images and episodes. The following two chapters examine the period from August to the close of our chronology in mid-1915. Like the other chapters, there is a mixture of rumour and truth, enthusiasm and apathy. Like the other chapters there is the retrospective influence of memory and myth. Unlike the other chapters, they examine how the themes developed over specific periods and events encompassed the everyday experience of war.

With the outbreak of war came a great transformation of the landscape, both mental and physical. This change occurred not only in the countries within the theatre of war, but in the lives of all those in combatant countries. The conflict confronted the combatant country not only with their enemy, but also with themselves - the war required a redefinition, a sharpening of identity. We have seen how discussions over the war presented versions of the nation as pacifist and prudent or honourable and resolved. And how these versions could be decried as money obsessed or warlike and jingoist respectively. At the level of smaller communities, the same process was occurring. The 'boundary' of the community, to use the phrase of anthropologists, constitutes a point of continual negotiation over who is included and excluded.<sup>1</sup> In August 1914 we can see a period when this negotiation was vastly accelerated and heightened. The aim of recreating the community around the twin ideals of 'calm' and 'unity' has been

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<sup>1</sup> Cohen, *The Symbolic Construction of Community* (Chichester, 1985), pp 11-15.

discussed; this chapter will develop these themes, and examine some of the events that undermined these ideals. In these weeks and months we can see the development of a 'war enthusiasm' looking inward, rather than outwards towards the fighting in France. It was an enthusiasm for 'taking part', for the inclusion of all classes of society in the exhilaration of a shared purpose - the community at war.

We have seen in the preceding chapter how the twin pillars of 'calm' and 'unity' would be the ballast for the war effort. We have also examined how these two aims ultimately undermined each other, the intentions to continue 'business as usual' falling short of the dedication demanded of such a grave struggle. These tensions particularly coloured the period, before the emergence of the coalition government and specialised war phenomena such as the Ministry of Munitions. Society was still undergoing the earliest transition to 'total war'. How could the correct balance be struck between commitment and composure? Our rethought interpretation of 'war enthusiasm' - as an inward glorification of purpose, a rejection of a decadence thought to have consumed the years before 1914 - expresses itself in many different contexts. Part of this transformation included the need to redefine the community, to define who was now included in this new nation-at-war.<sup>2</sup> The affirmation of enthusiasm was expressed in the desire to proclaim this inclusion to others through display.

This chapter traces the beginnings of the 'rolling narrative' of war. It surveys discussions over the reinvention of Britain in the first months of conflict. The departure of troops to the front represented the *main manifestation of August 1914 crowds, with a different atmosphere to the warlike mobs of our modern mythology*. Demand for war news is discussed through the *interest in those who had seen the war first hand, whether civilian or combatant*. Central to the inward looking 'war enthusiasm' was the volunteer ethic - the need to be included - on the home front, and this was reflected in a massive expansion of charitable endeavour.

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<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of how this inclusion was sometimes violently arbitrated, see Chapter Five: 'The Violence of Belonging'.

The desire to make this inclusion visible through systems of display closes the chapter. A famous recruiting poster showed an array of men and women in various essential war duties, including soldiers, nurses and munitions workers.<sup>3</sup> The poster asked ‘Are you in THIS?’ challenging the viewer to prove his or her value to the war effort. Proving that worth was achieved across all areas of the war effort by a range of visual symbols that could be worn, displayed and instantly recognised by others. The khaki uniform of a soldier was the most prized, but there were numerous methods by which those of the Home Front proclaimed their inclusion.

### I – ‘*The Regeneration of England*’ – *Narrating War*

The debates surrounding the outbreak of war have been examined, and the claim has been made that the ‘war enthusiasm’ of 1914 failed to resemble Lloyd George’s retrospective account of a public ‘howling for war’. This section examines how this enthusiasm persisted and developed until mid-1915. Both Becker and Verhey have identified a difference between the ambiguity of reactions to the outbreak of war and the more definite emotions - of both patriotism and anxiety - engendered by the departure of troops.<sup>4</sup> I would argue that this represents a larger divide between the uncertainty of the ‘crisis’ period and the more explicit acceptance of being ‘at war’ that followed. The ideas of ‘calm’ and ‘unity’ were central to this ‘war enthusiasm’, and the development of ways to strengthen and spread these virtues characterised the first month of war. The departure of troops was one of many communal ‘set-pieces’ through which the enthusiasm for common purpose and inclusion was expressed. To a certain extent, the need to look inwards was also a symptom of the lack of news. The irony of the increased interest in the press and the boom sales for papers was that, during pre-Mons August and the later months of stalemate, there was little the papers could print about events on the continent.

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<sup>3</sup> The poster can be found in numerous books, I took this from *The Story of 25 Eventful Years in Pictures*, a commemorative book published for the jubilee of George V in 1935.

<sup>4</sup> J.J. Becker, ‘“That’s the death knell of our boys...”’ in P. Friedenson (ed.), *The French Home Front 1914-18* (Oxford, 1992), pp. 17-36. Verhey, *The Spirit of 1914: Militarism, myth and mobilization in 1914* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 102-5.



We must also recognise that the sources we are examining are engaged in the generation of a narrative. Verhey examines in detail the development of a ‘myth of 1914’ throughout German culture until 1945, but we can also look to more immediate retrospection. The speed of events in 1914 meant that many began to ‘remember’ and mythologise both *during* and immediately following the first days of August 1914. On 6 August, F.A. Robinson noted in his diary, itself started solely to record the war, that ‘[w]e are living in a different world!’<sup>5</sup> The *Wiltshire News* attempted to sum up the upheaval of the outbreak of war, and provided an early ‘narrative’ of August 1914. The populace was portrayed as oblivious to the prospect of such a conflict:

Three short weeks ago the man who ventured to prophesy that the greatest war the world had ever known was about to begin would have been laughed at for his pains. Three weeks ago! Those of us who were not then thinking of our summer holidays, or of the harvest, or talking placidly of the prospects of an early general election, had our eyes upon Ireland.<sup>6</sup>

Even as the Balkan crisis began to erupt, the people, ‘engrossed as we were with our own political and private affairs’ paid little heed, having ‘grown tired of the everlasting Eastern question’.<sup>7</sup> But when war was declared, all apathy and division disappeared. The paper recalled that ‘in the twinkling of an eye we forgot our internal troubles and dissensions’.<sup>8</sup> That was considered some feat; the writer added that ‘to the astonishment of many nations who do not know Britain, and in particular to the astonishment of our greatest and lifelong enemy, the War Lord of Europe, England achieved the apparently impossible’. The ‘impossible’ was a recasting of the nation:

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<sup>5</sup> Robinson, diary entry for 6 August, 1914, IWM.

<sup>6</sup> *WN*, 14 August, 1914.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

In twenty-four hours the England of peace had become the England of war, strong, resolute, confident, “standing four square to all winds that blow”, ready for all eventualities.<sup>9</sup>

The proud rhetoric almost anticipates Churchill’s thoughts on the outbreak of war in his eloquent inter-war style, yet it was printed in just the second week of war. The Wiltshire writer lists summer holidays, the harvest and the coming election before Ireland in the list of concerns. He evokes the warm, tranquil days of certainty that became a staple of British cultural views of the war in the 1920s. Certainly in areas distant from Irish influence, the Home Rule unrest could have seemed as remote as Serbian terrorism. We have discussed how the memory of the South African War informed reactions in 1914. Here we can see the mythologising of *summer* 1914, which began in the first days of August, as the press sought to express the new found purpose of the community at war.<sup>10</sup> But another construct of summer 1914 held sway, particularly in the first months of war. It was the summer of a feckless, divided Britain, the beginnings of a view that reached its apotheosis in the works of inter-war writers such as George Dangerfield.<sup>11</sup> The image of a domestically troubled, indulgent pre-war nation was a product of this new narrative. It reinforced the idea of a new, unified nation.

This new community, unified in stance but calm in its steely resolve, was not merely the creation of provincial newspapers searching for an inspiring editorial. It was David Lloyd George himself who articulated most clearly the ‘enthusiasm’ for the challenge of war. In September 1914, when still Chancellor of the Exchequer, he gave a speech at the Queen’s Hall in London. Lloyd George equated the nation with ‘a beautiful valley’ he knew in North Wales – ‘snug, comfortable, sheltered by the mountains from all the bitter blasts’.<sup>12</sup> The war would spoil this idyll, but the rewards of change would be a new vigour:

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> ‘Once more now in the march of centuries Old England was to stand forth in battle against the mightiest thrones and dominations. Once more in defence of the liberties of Europe and the common right must she enter upon a voyage of great toil and hazard across waters uncharted, toward coasts unknown, guided only by the stars.’ W. Churchill, *The World Crisis*, p. 144.

<sup>11</sup> G. Dangerfield, *The Strange Death of Liberal England* (London, 1936).

<sup>12</sup> M. MacDonagh, *In London During the Great War* (London, 1935), p.27.

We have been living in a sheltered valley for generations. We have been too comfortable, too indulgent, many, perhaps, too selfish. Now the stern hand of Fate has scourged us to an elevation where we can see the great everlasting things that matter for a Nation – the great peaks we had forgotten of honour, duty, patriotism; and, clad in glittering white, the great pinnacle of sacrifice, pointing like a rugged finger to Heaven.<sup>13</sup>

For *Times* journalist Michael MacDonagh the speech endorsed ‘that new and consoling view of War – as “a blessing in disguise!”’<sup>14</sup> The words of Lloyd George emphasised the unity and dedication demanded of the war – ‘he personifies our War aims and emotions’.<sup>15</sup> The pivot of 4 August 1914 was already being seen as all-encompassing, though its transformation was greeted as a positive one:

We have lived in a fool’s paradise long enough. We looked up, startled from our little petty pursuits and squabbles, and rubbed our eyes, half fancying that the rumblings we hear are but those of a far-off passing storm that will not come near us.<sup>16</sup>

The new challenge was stern one, more serious than any in living memory. As in the first August days, the rejection of the bellicose attitudes of the South African War is made plain in public and in private. Any enthusiasm reminiscent of the Boer conflict was more often seen as childish, and at odds with the current mood. Robert Baden-Powell, the hero of Mafeking in 1900, was reported in the *Grimsby Daily Telegraph* as issuing ‘an appeal to village lads to stop flag waving and to come forward to do something for their country’.<sup>17</sup> The same day the paper reported that ‘war fever’ was strong in the youth of the town, and followed with a light-hearted anecdote of children fighting a ‘pitched battle’ with turnips

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Cambridge Daily News* (hereafter *CDN*), 31 August, 1914.

<sup>17</sup> *Grimsby Daily Telegraph* (hereafter *GDT*), 13 August, 1914.

and mud.<sup>18</sup> The *Brighouse Echo* proudly stated that ‘the people are characterised by quiet determination to see the thing through rather than by an exuberant enthusiasm’.<sup>19</sup> The editor of the Tory *Morning Post*, Howell Arthur Gwynne, wrote to his correspondent in St. Petersburg on domestic public opinion:

You have to bear in mind one thing: this war is not a ‘Mafficking’ war. We all feel it too deeply and too strongly. They do not even cheer the troops as they march through the streets. No bells are rung for a victory. There is no outward sign of rejoicing or grieving; but it is England at its very best, silent, undemonstrative, but absolutely determined.<sup>20</sup>

The nation had shed its past and been made anew. As one newspaper editorial put it, ‘[a] purified and ennobled nation is bound to rise out of the ashes of this devastating fire. That indeed is one solace and comfort’.<sup>21</sup> Such sentiments were commonly heard from the pulpit, providing a more congenial theological framework for the war. As the Reverend Robert Stansfield preached in Keighley parish church:

I mean to say, if the war is to result in any real blessing to the people of the Empire, and it is of this I selfishly think first and most, it is the process of purification. If there is to be a regenerated British Empire, I believe it can only be brought about through suffering. England cannot be regenerated without sacrifice.<sup>22</sup>

Vera Brittain’s vicar concurred, claiming that through the war, ‘God was calling us by this terrible calamity from our life of sensation & self-indulgence’.<sup>23</sup> When the change was recognised by those abroad, it was a cause for pride. An editorial in the *New York Sun*, entitled ‘The Regeneration of England’ was reprinted in

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Brighouse Echo* (hereafter *BE*), 16 October, 1914.

<sup>20</sup> H.A. Gwynne to V. Marsden, 1 December, 1914 in K. Wilson (ed.), *The Rasp of War: The letters of H.A. Gwynne to the Countess Bathurst 1914-1918* (London, 1988).

<sup>21</sup> *Crewe Chronicle* (hereafter *CC*), 24 October, 1914.

<sup>22</sup> *Keighley News* (hereafter *KN*), 24 October, 1914.

<sup>23</sup> V. Brittain, *Chronicle of Youth: War Diary 1913-17* (London, 1981), p. 100.

many domestic newspapers.<sup>24</sup> England represented 'at the present moment a striking spectacle of national regeneration'.<sup>25</sup> In recent years the nation seemed 'plunged into a torpor from which it appeared impossible to awaken her'.<sup>26</sup> Crises, from the Sudan to the suffragettes, were 'powerless to arouse her from her sleeping sickness'.<sup>27</sup> Foreign commentators 'either gloated or mourned over her decadence'.<sup>28</sup> Then came the war:

[S]ince the beginning of August there has been a marvellous change: Englishmen have shown since they have thrown down the gauntlet to Germany barely seven weeks ago, that all the talk concerning the moral and physical deterioration of their race is without foundation, and that they remain true to the original stock from which so many of us on this side of the Atlantic are proud to trace our descent.<sup>29</sup>

To themselves and to others looking on, England was forever changed. The 'process of purification' had begun.

One aspect of this purification was a denial of luxury. At the opening of Parliament in November, the King and Queen arrived in 'a plain, unadorned vehicle' rather than the grandiose State coach.<sup>30</sup> The troops that lined the route were dressed in khaki in place of ceremonial scarlet. As MacDonagh noted '[t]he War dimmed the colours'.<sup>31</sup> One of the major recruiting drives encouraged those employing men as servants to release them for service: 'Will you sacrifice your personal convenience for your Country's needs?'<sup>32</sup> The tension between enjoying leisure activities and pursuing the war effort was a matter for debate, as we will see in the following chapter. MacDonagh wrote in December that the public 'are warned that we must not live to eat and drink; that we must eat and

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<sup>24</sup> *Cit.*, CC, 17 October, 1914.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* For more on anxieties over moral and physical deterioration, see Chapter Four, 'Remaking English Manhood'.

<sup>30</sup> MacDonagh, *In London During the Great War*, p. 40.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.

drink just sufficiently to enable us to live – to help in the prosecution of the war'.<sup>33</sup> The sacrifices were large and small. In Essex, Mrs. Purbrook and her family 'agreed to go without sugar in our tea'.<sup>34</sup> Reverend Andrew Clark recorded in his diary that the local manor house in his Essex village announced a list of savings, including 'either butter or jam, not both', and 'no cake at tea'.<sup>35</sup> He also noted that 'village gossip' was derisive of the sacrifice, 'always spiteful and disparaging and ungrateful'.<sup>36</sup> One controversy emerged at Easter over the traditional Good Friday hot-cross bun. Those who demurred claimed that the increasingly expensive flour should only be used to make loaves, but 'popular custom was irresistible', and most sat down to hot-cross buns on Good Friday. The buns themselves, however, were something of a disappointment: 'No halfpenny buns were made, and the penny buns were smaller in size than those in times of peace'.<sup>37</sup> The conflict between 'business as usual' and a war 'unity' permeated every aspect of life.

Lloyd George's vision was of a nation purged of extravagance. Alongside this sacrifice was the promise of a sober – literally in the Chancellor's mind – and composed Britain, ready for the challenge. H.A. Gwynne was complimentary towards the 'undemonstrative nature' of the English people. But to what extent did this 'calm' represent resignation, or even apathy? Did the need to speak and endorse a narrative of a committed nation of war reflect a society at odds with the vision? Jean-Jacques Becker identifies an increasing sense of the 'banality of war' in France as the months passed into 1914.<sup>38</sup> The excitement of the outbreak of war and the departure of troops was replaced by an acceptance of war as routine and everyday. A Paris reporter noted in October 1914 that '[p]eople are settling down to the war as they might settle into a new home'.<sup>39</sup> F.A. Robinson claimed in his diary that 'in many parts of France the public have come to consider the war as "one of the necessary evils of life like house rent and taxes"

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

<sup>34</sup> Mrs. A Purbrook, unpublished diary/memoir, IWM 97/3/1.

<sup>35</sup> J. Munson (ed.), *Echoes of the Great War: The diary of the Reverend Andrew Clark 1914-1919* (Oxford, 1988), p. 12.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> MacDonagh, *In London During the Great War*, pp. 56-57.

<sup>38</sup> J.J. Becker, *The Great War and the French People*, (Leamington Spa, 1985; trans. A. Pomerans), pp. 105-112.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 101.

and that in many places the inhabitants have settled down into their normal existence again'.<sup>40</sup> Was there a 'settling down' to war in England in the first months of war? Though the experience of France and Britain was substantially different, we can trace similar reports of this acceptance of war conditions. The *Keighley News*, in a article headed 'Settling Down', attempted to place the conflict in context:

The first unsettlement caused by the war, or rather by the announcement of war, having been got over, people have begun to view things not merely in a philosophical but in a genuinely practical and businesslike spirit. Even those who were most flustered at the outset have come to realise that the bottom has not altogether dropped out of the world. Things have not come to a complete standstill.<sup>41</sup>

The London Letter of the *Cambridge Daily News* reported in early September on how '[t]here are no more crowds in the Mall and no more cheering in the Palace'.<sup>42</sup> Khaki-clad soldiers were no longer 'unfamiliar' sights in the streets, and people 'no longer buy every edition of the evening papers'.<sup>43</sup>

As the war carried on into the New Year, what was once exciting had now become routine. At first, the sight of soldiers in the streets was worthy of note; MacDonagh wrote in the early days of 1915 that 'the novelty of it has long since worn off, so common has it become'.<sup>44</sup> F.A. Robinson wrote in January 1915:

The real fact is that people are getting used to the idea of being at war, and things go on much the same as usual. For instance, the sales at the big stores are taking place as usual this time of the year, and they are crowded with anxious buyers who apparently have unlimited sums to spend just as if nothing unusual were taking place in world outside.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Robinson, diary entry for 16 December, 1914, IWM.

<sup>41</sup> *KN*, 22 August, 1914.

<sup>42</sup> *CDN*, 2 September, 1914.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> MacDonagh, *In London During the Great War*, p. 51.

<sup>45</sup> Robinson, diary entry for 14 January, 1915.

Even for such an avid follower of the war as Robinson, a growing sense of malaise was unavoidable:

Take for instance the first casualty list which was published, how eagerly we read it; to-day the publication of such lists has become a matter of routine, and therefore monotonous. There are to-day many people who scarcely realise that a war is going on.<sup>46</sup>

Did this sense of 'monotony' or 'banality' mark a lack of concern over the war? We must be careful of denying public interest in or appetite for the war. The evidence elsewhere in this study of participation in events official and unofficial renders such an interpretation untenable. For example, MacDonagh's entry for Easter Sunday 1915 reveals how London crowds 'thought of quite an unwonted way of spending their Sunday off – which was to get into as close contact with the War as is possible in London'.<sup>47</sup> Parents 'brought their children to see the Admiralty and the War Office', and the public 'thronged' the streets around the major military monuments.<sup>48</sup> As MacDonagh stated, 'it would be impossible now to get away from the War, even if anyone wished to'.<sup>49</sup> But there was a perceptible feeling that some of the population had not yet walked out from Lloyd George's 'sheltered valley'. H.A. Gwynne wrote to the *Morning Post* owner Lady Bathurst at the end of August 1914:

It is not that men will not serve, but you cannot bring it home to them [*the public*] that we are fighting for our existence. They will persist in thinking it is a Continental war and not one in which England is most intimately involved.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 12 March, 1915.

<sup>47</sup> MacDonagh, *In London During the Great War*, p. 57.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> H.A. Gwynne to Lady Bathurst, letter dated 26 August 1914 in K. Wilson (ed.), *The Rasp of War*.



Decrying apathy in public speeches was an established element of recruitment rhetoric, using criticism to shame or challenge an audience. One editorial asked accusingly, '[w]ill the young men of Grimsby who come within this category choose the meaner part of fighting with their mouths, or will they rally to the colours?'<sup>51</sup> An early meeting in Warminster, Wiltshire, stated 'Recruits Wanted - Not Talk'.<sup>52</sup> The cry of 'deeds - not words' became a refrain. A recruiting speaker from the West Riding declared in October that '[w]hat had struck him since he returned to Huddersfield was the indifference of the youth of the town'.<sup>53</sup> 'Everything was going on as usual', he continued, 'and the consequence was that they were not alive to the situation'.<sup>54</sup> Memories of the immediate post-war period evoked the same initial reticence in accepting the gravity of the conflict. Philip Gibbs, the war correspondent, recalled in 1920 that 'it took some time to awaken the people to a sense of real peril, and of personal menace to their hearths and homes'.<sup>55</sup> A history of Swindon during the conflict, written in the early 1920s, remembered that it was '[t]he year 1915 [*which*] finally opened the eyes of most people to the true nature of the struggle'.<sup>56</sup>

Such conflicting accounts reflect the paradox inherent in the desire for 'calm' and 'unity'. What was praised as 'undemonstrative' could also be damned as simply apathetic. This ambiguity was not resolved by mid-1915, and one local newspaper discussed the problem in May:

As an instance of what we meant recently in writing of the failure of people generally to realise what the war means, we give a remark made the other day by a lady. She said, "It's a pity we've got this war; it will spoil the whole summer." This lady reads the papers and hears the war discussed on all sides, yet this was all she had grasped of its meaning. Its worst aspect was its inconvenience.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> *GDT*, 31 August, 1914.

<sup>52</sup> *Wiltshire News* (hereafter *WN*), 21 August, 1914.

<sup>53</sup> *Huddersfield Examiner* (hereafter *HE*), 29 October 1914.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> P. Gibbs, *The Realities of War* (London, 1920), p. 425.

<sup>56</sup> W.D. Bavin, *Swindon's War Record* (Swindon, 1922), p. 32.

<sup>57</sup> *Romford Times*, 12 May, 1915.

‘It has been said’, the article went on, ‘that our unmoved acceptance of those figures [*of war expenditure*] is only another expression of the matter of fact, calm, strong, imperturbable elements of the British character’.<sup>58</sup> The paper argued that it was instead a ‘want of imagination’ to ‘realise the position’:

There is all the difference in the world between the calm of indifference and the calm of fixed, strong, forceful determination [...] Surely it is time we realised that this war is more than an unfortunate temporary interruption to our routine of business and pleasure.<sup>59</sup>

This discussion derives from an Essex newspaper, in a county that had its fair share of Zeppelin raids and exposure to mobilisation. To measure interest and commitment to war is impossible; we can only identify the strands of thought. Diary accounts give various views. People who set out to write specialised war diaries, such as Rev. Andrew Clark and F.A. Robinson, reflect those deeply committed and observant to all items of war news. More general accounts written to record experience of the war, such as the notebooks of Mary Coules or Mrs. Purbrook, naturally reflect an interest in the conflict.<sup>60</sup> Conversely, the account of Frank Taylor Lockwood, a conventional diary kept for years before 1914, suggests how a young man of the era might have little interest in the war. Although general observations on the war local and national are made and prove invaluable to the historian, the bulk of Lockwood’s diary is the minutiae of everyday life such as cricket scores, walks and the cinema. In essence therein lies the value. As the Keighley editorial stated, affairs had not reached ‘a complete standstill’. Lockwood is as representative as those who sought and catalogued news about the war - whilst the war appeared to have entered every area of public life, for some it still formed the backdrop to the everyday. Thus for those that celebrated the absence of ‘mafficking’ hysteria, there was also the fear that quiet determination masked a worrying lack of commitment.

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<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> Coules, IWM, 97/25/1.

## II – Fervent Cheers and Sad Goodbyes

If the refrain for the early months of war was ‘deeds – not words’, then the departure of troops was an instance of ‘deeds’ made manifest, among the most important episodes in the first month of war. As with the accounts of the response to the outbreak of war, most newspapers reported composed determination rather than frivolous celebration. Mobilisation was in many instances very soon, sometimes the same night, after the declaration of war, so something of the same mood - trepidation, curiosity, excitement - accompanied the departure of troops. In Huddersfield, over a thousand territorials marched through the town on the night of 4 August. In the words of the *Examiner*, ‘a good deal of interest was shown in the men’s departure. On every side the seriousness of the situation was realised. The men [...] had a very cordial but quiet reception’.<sup>61</sup> In Haverhill near Cambridge, the entire population ‘seemed to be astir’ to send off the territorials. But the mood was reserved; ‘the majority, however, remained silent, recognising the grim realities which caused the necessity for such a departure’.<sup>62</sup> Troops departed from Peterborough in the early hours of Sunday 9 August. In marked contrast to the unrest elsewhere in the city, the soldiers’ departure was conducted in a sombre atmosphere:

[A]ll through the night one came across quiet groups surrounding an Artilleryman. It was a sad goodbye. Up and down the streets ‘til two or three o’clock on Sunday morning these pathetic groups were met. It was a strange experience to say goodbye just as dawn was breaking [...]<sup>63</sup>

The press reported that a ‘fairly large crowd of relatives and friends’ saw the train leave at half past four, ‘amid not a loud but a very fervent cheer’.<sup>64</sup>

Comparisons with the South African War remained important. The London correspondent of the *Cambridge Daily News* remarked that ‘the orgies which accompanied the departure of troops for South Africa are not likely to be

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<sup>61</sup> *HE*, 5 August, 1914.

<sup>62</sup> *CDN*, 6 August, 1914.

<sup>63</sup> *Peterborough Citizen*, 12 August, 1914. For details of the unrest, see Chapter Five, ‘The Violence of Belonging’ chapter.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

repeated in this stern business'.<sup>65</sup> In Aldershot the *News* noted the reactions to the departing Expeditionary Force:

How different were the scenes in Aldershot at the departure of the troops for France to what were seen during the despatch of the troops to South Africa. There were no flags, no bands, no crowds, no cheering [...] It was a grim, and for the most part silent speeding.<sup>66</sup>

In Keighley, almost ten thousand lined the route from the Drill Hall to the railway bridge, 'but while there was plenty of enthusiasm displayed there was not anything like that unrestrained enthusiasm which marked the departure of the Reservists and Volunteers in 1900'.<sup>67</sup>

Despite the anxieties which obviously surrounded the men leaving for war, the event could be celebratory, and even light-hearted. A concertina band playing "Scotch Airs" and "Tipperary" accompanied the troops leaving Bury:

When they reached the railway station they boarded a waiting train and, as this pulled out, the band struck up "Auld Lang Syne" until the last carriage disappeared around the bend towards Manchester. Then it played the National Anthem for the benefit of the crowds who had seen the troops off.<sup>68</sup>

In Cambridge a crowd of several hundred gave a 'hearty send off' to local reservists. A cornet player performed several uplifting tunes, and 'a number of impromptu speeches were made, notably by a foreigner, apparently a German, who declared that the English were his friends, and that he was not going to fight against them'.<sup>69</sup> A few days later, the territorials, followed by a band, marched through the town, of whom 'all seemed delighted [...] it was a march that

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<sup>65</sup> *CDN*, 8 August, 1914.

<sup>66</sup> *Aldershot News*, 21 August, 1914.

<sup>67</sup> *KN*, 8 August, 1914.

<sup>68</sup> G. Moorhouse, *Hell's Foundations: A town, its myths and Gallipoli* (London, 1992), p.49.

<sup>69</sup> *CDN*, 5 August, 1914.

Cambridge people will not soon forget'.<sup>70</sup> In Swindon two thousand watched the reservists leave.<sup>71</sup> The *Barrow News* reported on the warm goodbyes that their reservists received on leaving train stations across the local district. Men from the village of Millom 'sang ragtime choruses as the train started'. Barrow, as a naval shipbuilding centre, saw the arrival of troops to guard its factories, and these became a focus of interest. There was 'quite a little army' in the town.<sup>72</sup> A procession, including policemen and numerous regiments was led from the Town Hall by the Mayor, as large crowds lined the route.<sup>73</sup> The visibility of troops brought the prospect of war home to England. As one Swindon woman remarked, 'it made one feel as if the war is in this town'.<sup>74</sup> There was a definite sense that the war would be a stern test - the departing men would be risking their lives. Frivolity, a feature of the response to recent wars in Britain, therefore seemed misplaced.<sup>75</sup> The departure of troops did much to bring home the reality of the war. No longer was it long debates in columns of newsprint, but a train leaving from a local station.

### III – Journeys Home

There were other ways in which the war was brought home to civilians. One source of information about the war was the stream of eyewitnesses who returned from the continent. The speed of events meant that many people found themselves, at work or on holiday, in France, Belgium or Germany. The *Barrow News* remarked, with an air of grim humour, that '[f]rom the point of view of the holiday maker, the war cloud could not have burst over Europe at a more inopportune juncture'.<sup>76</sup> The accounts of the returning people and their journey back through the combatant countries provided a way of bringing new perspectives on the war, through the eyes of a local citizen. Headlines such as 'Grimbarians escape from the Ruhr' or 'Aldershot woman's hectic journey' were widespread in the local press in August 1914, and were usually accompanied by

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<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 8 August, 1914.

<sup>71</sup> *WN*, 14 August, 1914.

<sup>72</sup> *Barrow News* (hereafter *BN*), 8 August, 1914.

<sup>73</sup> *BN*, 15 August, 1914.

<sup>74</sup> *WN*, 21 August, 1914.

<sup>75</sup> See Moorhouse, *Hell's Foundations*, pp. 49-50.

<sup>76</sup> *BN*, 29 August, 1914.

photographs and lengthy interviews. In the absence of any news of the war, the impressions of those who witnessed events on the continent were followed with interest. As Miss Fletcher, who had made her way back to Grimsby via Arras, Boulogne and Folkestone remarked, 'I don't think people here quite realise what is going on over there'.<sup>77</sup> An important component of these stories were the perceptions of the mood and actions of the foreign civilians, and how these related to the narratives of the domestic response to war.

Those who returned from France or Belgium told stories of the spirit of Britain's allies. The Saxton brothers, Tom and Reginald reached Brussels on 2 August with a Thomas Cook tour. Declining the chance to leave immediately they lingered, hoping to 'see some of the war'. The mood of the Belgians was seen in the context of British intervention:

We have heard of the gloom and despondency which characterised Paris until she knew definitely that England was to wield the sword with her, and the unbridled enthusiasm and rejoicing which followed news of that decision. So too, in Belgium.<sup>78</sup>

The British national anthem and cries of 'Vive l'anglais' were commonplace in Brussels, and 'a warm, hearty feeling was extended' to the Saxtons.<sup>79</sup> The need to identify outsiders was paramount. Anti-German feeling was 'very pronounced', and the brothers claimed they witnessed the arrest of several spies. An example of enthusiasm spilling into mob violence against Germans was viewed as the result of provocation:

Mr Saxton spoke of one German at Brussels who, with the characteristic indiscretion of his Emperor, hoisted the national flag. The mob promptly displaced a pane of plate glass, and had it not been for the timely

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<sup>77</sup> *GDT*, 29 August, 1914.

<sup>78</sup> *BN*, 15 August, 1914.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

appearance of the civil guards, the hapless Teuton would undoubtedly suffered severe damage.<sup>80</sup>

The Saxtons reached Ostend, where the mood was more serious as the war was developing, and music and dancing were ‘suspended because husbands and sons were at the war’. A letter published in the *Barrow News* from a Barrow resident whose son was working in Belgium reported that all the German cafés had been smashed, whilst the Belgian troops left singing for the front.<sup>81</sup>

Not all reports of the temper of Britain’s allies were so positive. The experience of a Barrow clergyman in France suggested a more ambiguous response. In Paris everything was closed, it appeared like ‘a city of the dead’. Yet at the same time, ‘the visitors could not help but notice the enthusiasm with which certain anti-war meetings were being conducted’.<sup>82</sup> Again, widespread suspicions over outsiders resulted in the need to repeatedly show passports, and the tourist and his companions were met shouts of “Les Allemands” from children. Away from the capital in the southern regions round Toulouse, it seemed that news of the war had been very slow to reach rural areas. Despite this less than favourable report of the French, the clergyman enjoyed a much better experience crossing paths with the British Army in Amiens. When asked of their demeanour, “Very Enthusiastic” was the ready reply [*of the clergyman*]. “By their conduct they seemed to say: we shall not be long in coming home again”.<sup>83</sup>

Those who made their way home from Germany could relate more exciting tales of the actions of the enemy. The report of the British Consul in Danzig painted a picture of a bellicose, angry populace. The Consul recalled that ‘[a]t every street corner, rifles were levelled at them, and they were hooted and insulted’. Leaving from Danzig train station, they were ‘molested’ by soldiers, who told the entourage that they would be shot if they attempted to escape from the train. In addition, there were ‘crowds on the platform, angry and menacing; insulting

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<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 29 August, 1914.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

phrases were written on the carriage, and all food was refused'. On the train to Hamburg they were searched, some of the ladies being examined in 'a most indelicate fashion'. Finally in Hamburg they were greeted by a German officer 'who behaved as a gentleman'.<sup>84</sup> Other accounts suggested that the German people were more civilised towards those caught up in the crisis. Miss Lott, who was the assistant mistress of 'a London school' and originally hailed from Swindon, was touring the Black Forest and Heidelberg when war was declared. Many German housewives, she claimed, had been storing provisions for nearly a year in preparation for war, though not with Britain. She recalled that the Germans 'never had a bigger shock in their lives' than when Britain declared war:

They never thought that England would fight against them. I spoke to a German lady who said "we do love the English people; it would break their hearts if we had to fight against them". German students we met said the same.

Yet after war was declared, 'the feelings of the Germans became very bitter'. Cameras were confiscated, luggage searched and Miss Lott was forced to travel third class back to Hamburg. But still, 'in no respect could Miss Lott say that the Germans were in any way discourteous to any of the British visitors'.<sup>85</sup>

The Saxtons' portraits featured in the *Barrow News*, yet those who already had fame in the town or city were subjects of greater interest. When town notables were in exile, then their return could provide a cause for celebration. The prospective Conservative candidate for Swindon, Colonel Calley, managed to return to Swindon after a journey of several weeks.<sup>86</sup> Arriving in Swindon on 20 August, Calley, who was also commanding officer of the Wiltshire National Reserve, was met with crowds and flags.<sup>87</sup> He had been 'taking the cure' at Homburg, where two men had been shot as spies. The Colonel and his party

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<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> *WN*, 21 August, 1914.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*



made it to Cologne, where there were large scale preparations for the return of wounded troops. There, he and all the English under the age of 45 were confined in a room of 'fair size' containing around seventy people, 'including Russian peasants "and all sorts"'. His impression of life in the hands of the Germans was favourable, particularly the conduct of officers and soldiers. He and his party were 'well treated except for incivility by underlings'. Civilians however, on the frontier in particular, were 'incensed against the English', and shouted that they should be shot as spies. Abuse was also directed at them over the alleged British treatment of German refugees.<sup>88</sup>

The veracity of these accounts is, in many ways, unimportant. What is of more interest is the purpose of such narratives. The reports reflect the domestic obsession with spies, who seem to be present in every town on the continent.<sup>89</sup> In the same way that the 'war fever' of 1900 was used to highlight the determined response of 1914, perceptions of the enthusiasms of Germany emphasised a wild, warlike spirit, not to be emulated at home. Yet representations of the enemy were not wholly negative. A common feature of these accounts is the politeness of those in official spheres contrasted with base nature of German civilian population. Sometimes this developed into a simple class bias - the officer who behaved as a 'gentleman' after a rough train journey with the peasants, the young Austrian officer who claimed a young woman was his fiancé to get her through the border to Switzerland. This bolstered the view of the Germans as a noble nation similar to Britain, and therefore a stern prospect in war. Other reports stressed the different levels of preparedness for war in Germany. Either they would be on their knees socially and economically, or they had been preparing for months and were having no problems with the food panics that were sweeping Britain. One view inspired confidence; the other required an increased resolve. As the only 'friendly' source of information, these eyewitness accounts were in great demand.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> See the 'Spy Fever' discussion in Chapter Three "Business as usual?".

<sup>90</sup> The neutral American papers provided reports from Berlin, and translations of German papers were printed in the large national British dailies..

For the provincial press, the interviews placed a member of the community within the context of the European war. Making the war 'local' was a vital component of 'war enthusiasm', bringing the war 'home' to those who had not yet grasped its importance. For those who felt they *had* grasped the challenge of the war, making the war 'local' manifested itself in the vocation of civic and charitable duty, which is where we now turn.

#### IV – 'Up and Doing' – 'War Enthusiasm', charity and display

For the departing troops, the war provided a new community in the army. When the trains pulled away and music of the band died down, those that waved the men off considered the war. What could the community do now? The answer lay, again, in the ideas of 'calm' and 'unity'. The speed of events, coupled with a Liberal government committed to *laissez faire*, meant that state organisation of the war effort would be slow in coming. The army was the clearest example of this. The state would have to rely on the voluntary disposition of the people. And the statistics clearly show - even if the motivations behind enlistment are much more complex than pure patriotism - that the response was much stronger than the state expected. The crowds left on the railway platform possessed, it seemed, the same ethic of volunteering. The desire to volunteer in aid of the war effort reflected the enthusiasm for involvement - to volunteer was to be *included* in the community at war. Subsequently the need to display this inclusion, to prove commitment to the war became vital. Charitable and voluntary works provided the means of publicly demonstrating one's contribution. This section traces the early contributions to the relief fund to the pageantry of the flag days that became widespread in 1915.

August 1914 saw, in Arthur Marwick's words, 'a last great flowering of grand-scale private charity'.<sup>91</sup> The Prince of Wales Fund was set up in the first days of the war and by the end of 1915 had raised over £5 million, and an abundance of war charities had managed to accrue £25 million in ten months.<sup>92</sup> The Prince of

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<sup>91</sup> Marwick, *The Deluge*, p. 42.

<sup>92</sup> T. Wilson, *The Myriad Faces of War* (Cambridge, 1988), p. 775; G. DeGroot, *Blighty: British society in the era of the Great War* (London, 1996), p. 64.

Wales Fund sought to provide ‘relief’ for the distress caused by the war, a vague aim that caused much controversy. The number of men for the colours each locality had produced was an easy measure of commitment. In the way the Relief Fund was divided into localities, it created another way to display and gauge the contribution of a town or region. The town’s elites often sought to lead the way. In Huddersfield the Fund was officially opened with a £10 donation from the Mayor.<sup>93</sup> The names of the contributors, and their donations, were printed in the local press, creating a philanthropic roll of honour, compelling many to put their name forward. Whilst printing the size of donations may have discouraged those of more modest means, the Relief Fund symbolised the ‘unity’ of the war effort. All classes were registered on the list. The *Grimsby Daily Telegraph* revealed that the largest donation to the National Fund had been £50,000, and the smallest had been a handkerchief.<sup>94</sup> Press reaction, as with comments on the community’s conduct, contains the same mix of commendation and cajolery. The *Barrow News* claimed that the National Relief Fund was ‘growing splendidly’, ‘[b]ut is Barrow doing its share? At present only a few have responded to the Mayor’s appeal [...] Do not be frightened at the large sums which head the list. You can do your share, however humble’. Local pride was at stake, as the *News* insisted: ‘[i]t must not be said that Barrow is behind in this noble work. Every one of us must do our best’.<sup>95</sup> The *News* felt that the ‘Barrow list should be infinitely larger than it is. Let there be a strong pull all together, and that end will be attained’.<sup>96</sup> Some towns referred to previous fund-raising exploits to prove their charitable spirit. During the Boer War, Trowbridge raised £800 for dependants of the troops - it was suggested that if the war was ‘prolonged’, the community would have to raise ‘even more’.<sup>97</sup> One result of this surge of giving was the growing number of channels in which the revenue could be diverted. The *Keighley News* listed the Voluntary Distress Committee, the Statutory Distress Committee, the National Relief Fund and the

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<sup>93</sup> *HE*, 10 August, 1914.

<sup>94</sup> *GDT*, 13 August, 1914.

<sup>95</sup> *BN*, 22 August, 1914.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>97</sup> *WN*, 7 August, 1914.

Charity Organisational Society, and commented that there were so many committees people were bewildered and not contributing as they should.<sup>98</sup>

The royal seal of the Prince of Wales Fund made it the first choice of many givers, yet the ambiguous nature of its aims created confusion over who would benefit. The 'national' nature of the fund caused consternation amongst those who saw distress on their own doorstep yet felt their allegiance to the crown. Some regions were viewed with scepticism as to their willingness to bestow their share. A 'London writer', reprinted in the *Keighley News*, noted that

[...] some uneasiness is said to be felt in the provinces with regard to the National Relief Fund [...] Some towns in the North which have established reputations for insisting on receiving value for their money will expect to get back at least as much as they have contributed.<sup>99</sup>

J.H. Tate, the Mayor of Grimsby, speaking at an emergency meeting on 12 August, stated that '[i]t was a national fund and as all of them knew that this war was a national crisis he believed it should be borne by the nation'. However, the anxiety on Grimsby's streets as hundreds of trawlers lay idle was not lost on the Mayor, who predicted hard times ahead for the town, let alone the nation:

He thought that everyone would agree that it would be impossible to meet the distress and to maintain and provide for the poor which unfortunately they anticipated. They were looking forward, probably to the dark side of things, but he was sure that in a very few days they would have upwards of 20,000 to 30,000 people who would have to be provided for.<sup>100</sup>

Yet most of those in distress suffered from the initial dislocation of trade due to the war, not the loss of a wage earner to the colours. Long standing prejudices over the distribution of relief came into play. One councillor stated that 'he did not feel disposed to give his money toward supporting the loafer or the man who

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<sup>98</sup> *KN*, 22 August, 1914.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 15 August, 1914.

<sup>100</sup> *GDT*, 13 August, 1914.

was going to spend his money in the public house'.<sup>101</sup> Other speakers and the Grimsby Trades Council argued that those who would arbitrate over relief were unrepresentative of the town. In Huddersfield *The Worker* dismissed the Distress Committee as nothing more than a 'glorified branch of the Charity Organisational Society', the epitome of middle class condescension.<sup>102</sup>

This condescension appeared to be very much in evidence. Sylvia Pankhurst's indictment of the disorganised and parsimonious nature of relief distribution in 1914 shows the practical side of the charitable ideal.<sup>103</sup> For the dependants of troops, the massive number of volunteers made the existing machinery painfully inadequate. Even when a claim was considered the meagre allowances of the Soldiers and Sailors Families Association were only paid out after investigations into the moral worthiness of the claimant.<sup>104</sup> The Prince of Wales fund kept mounting up, but there was little sign of any distribution in the first weeks of war. Pankhurst's own ideas on work schemes to combat the general poverty engendered by the war in the East End of London were deferred. Despite the new era of the war, old prejudices remained intact. The local notables Pankhurst encountered on the committees 'were steeped in the method of the Poor Law. To provide small doles mainly in kind, postponed as long as possible, was the sole thought in their mind'.<sup>105</sup>

For one who spent the war agitating against the *ad hoc* nature of the social provision, Pankhurst's memoir is understandably cynical towards the charitable spirit of 1914. Yet she recognised only too well the motivation behind many, particularly the wealthy, to become a part of the war effort. Affluent women, denied the expression of patriotism that enlistment provided, found in the charitable works a role and a purpose within the community at war. The *Grimsby Daily Telegraph* counted forty-six women from the newly formed Women's Emergency Corps involved in making 'articles' for soldiers.<sup>106</sup> Mary

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<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>102</sup> *The Worker*, 15 August, 1914.

<sup>103</sup> S., Pankhurst, *The Home Front: A mirror to life in England during the First World War* (London, 1932).

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>106</sup> *GDT*, 13 August, 1914.

Coules, from west London, recalled in 1915 how ‘everybody developed a craze for knitting socks’ in the first months of war.<sup>107</sup> In recalling the eager charitable workers, Pankhurst’s sarcasm is biting:

What liveliness and vivacity in London! Beautiful women in long white coats, flawlessly tailored, already were taking the part of chauffeurs. How speedily they had learnt to drive! It was truly amazing! [...] To serve, to be needed, to feel themselves part of this world-embracing Cause, with all the nation beside one!<sup>108</sup>

Away from vivacious London, women responded to the philanthropic call just as eagerly. Vera Brittain’s account of the Buxton ladies is similar in tone:

Few of humanity’s characteristics are more disconcerting than its ability to reduce world-events to its own level, wherever this may happen to lie. By the end of August, when Liège and Namur had fallen, and the misfortunes of the British Army were extending into the Retreat from Mons, the ladies of the Buxton élite had already set to work to provincialise the War.<sup>109</sup>

Bristling with the contempt of inter-war hindsight, Brittain and Pankhurst identified the crux of ‘war enthusiasm’. The war was a ‘European War Cloud’, massing across the sea. To encourage recruiting, to muster a ‘home front’, it needed to be brought to the street corner and the town hall. Those that could not fight could help to create this ‘community at war’. The image of privileged women hectoring the populace is pervasive in the memory of the Great War. They are the distributors of the white feather, the villains of Sassoon’s ‘Glory of Women’, the haughty philanthropists who knitted socks, oblivious to trench suffering.<sup>110</sup> But we must hesitate before accepting such a negative view of the

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<sup>107</sup> Coules, IWM, 97/25/1.

<sup>108</sup> Pankhurst, *The Home Front*, p. 38.

<sup>109</sup> Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, pp. 100-101.

<sup>110</sup> N. F. Gullace, ‘White Feathers and Wounded Men: Female patriotism and the memory of the Great War’, *Journal of British Studies*, 36 (1997), pp. 178-206. Also see Chapter Four, ‘I Will be a Man and Enlist’; J. Silkin (ed.), *The Penguin Book of First World War Poetry* (London, 1979), p. 132.

volunteer ethic of the Home Front. It sprang from the desire to help, to be involved. Brittain's retrospective ridicule in *Testament of Youth* forgets that she herself felt and answered the same longing to include herself in the war. As early as 6 August, her diary reads:

To-day I started the only work it seems possible as yet for women to do – the making of garments for the soldiers [...] I seemed to be the object of some amusement. But even when one is not skilful it is better to proceed slowly than to do *nothing* to help.<sup>111</sup>

With her loved ones in the services, Brittain was drawn to war work as a means of emulating their sacrifice, and consequently to keep her anxieties over their safety at bay. 'The more I have to do the better I shall be able to endure life', she wrote in her diary, 'especially if I am able to do work directly useful in the War'.<sup>112</sup> When a friend asked if she realised what hard work her nursing training would mean, Brittain replied in her diary:

Of course I know; I shall hate it, but I will be all the more ready to do it on that account. He [*her soon-to-be-fiancée Roland Leighton*] has to face far worse things than any sight or act I could come across; he can bear it - & so can I.<sup>113</sup>

Such ideals and emotions are rather callously served by Sassoon or Pankhurst's contempt. Even less profound contributions than nursing were inspired by similar intentions. Mrs. Purbrook's parish in Hornchurch, Essex, 'lost no time in organising a women's association' to make clothes for soldiers.<sup>114</sup> The experiences of returning soldiers in 1915 further inspired her 'to work with added zeal at anything and everything that may add in the smallest way to promote their comfort, cleanliness and warmth, and alleviate the privations and sufferings of the soldiers'.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Brittain, *War Diary*, p. 89.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 171.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 186. Original emphasis.

<sup>114</sup> Mrs. A Purbrook, IWM 97/3/1.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

Women were at the forefront of the fundraising events and initiatives, which became frequent fixtures in the first months of war. Like the departure of troops and recruitment meetings, these events were among the many 'set-pieces' of communal involvement in the war. Alongside the charitable intention was the desire to display one's contribution to the war effort. The 'Flag Day' became a common fixture of the home front, raising money for specific causes of the war effort. The earliest flag days raised money for the Belgian refugees, the most emotive cause of the first months of war. In Cambridge, the 'Belgian Badge Day' of October 1914 was described in parodic military reportage by the local press:

Early this morning an army of ladies of all ages sallied out armed with money boxes draped with the Belgian colours, and baskets similarly decorated filled with rosettes and bows. The town and its approaches were invested, and sentries were posted at all the street corners, and patrols marched and counter-marched along the main thoroughfares. Men on their way to business – and women too, for this army was no respecter of sex or persons – were held up to ransom and only allowed to pass on payment of a contribution towards the fund. In return for this they were given one of the favours and allowed to depart.<sup>116</sup>

Donations were large and small, from 'the child's halfpenny' to 'the half crown of the more opulent'.<sup>117</sup> By the end of the day 'hardly an inhabitant of Cambridge is to be seen without a badge', and men were thought to look 'quite gallant' with the colours tucked into their hats.<sup>118</sup> A month later, Vera Brittain recorded the 'Belgian Day' in Oxford, where townspeople 'had decorated themselves at every possible point with these paper rosettes, including hair & shoes, and horses, bicycles and shop windows were covered with them'.<sup>119</sup> In Huddersfield, St. George's Day 1915 was celebrated as a 'Flag day', with a

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<sup>116</sup> *CDN*, 17 October, 1914.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>119</sup> Brittain, *War Diary*, p. 124.



thousand collectors selling English flags. The town raised £890 for wounded soldiers and sailors.<sup>120</sup> Further national themed occasions followed throughout the summer, with fundraising for France and Poland, as well as 'War Horse Day'.<sup>121</sup> A day for the Huddersfield Mayoress's Red Cross Ambulance and Beds for Wounded Soldiers Fund saw over a thousand volunteers collecting money from six o'clock in the morning, raising £1,190.<sup>122</sup> The use of women as collectors made it easier to inspire contribution. In Cambridge the 'army of ladies' was very popular, and many eagerly 'sought capture' by the fundraisers.<sup>123</sup> There were 'ready and cheerful responses' at the Huddersfield Red Cross Day, 'the young lady collectors being irresistible in persuading all classes to purchase flags and not too exacting about change'.<sup>124</sup> Other, less official groups of ladies were involved in public fundraising. Mary Coules joined 'a choir of about 20 girls':

[W]e called ourselves The Black Dominoes, as we wore long black cloaks and masks – to sing the National Anthems of the allies in the streets, in aid of the Belgians. We made quite a considerable sum, & it was great fun.<sup>125</sup>

Vera Brittain collected for 'Primrose Day' in Buxton, finding the task 'somewhat tiring but quite amusing'.<sup>126</sup> 'People always treat you' she noted, 'when you go round collecting on behalf of something, as if you were begging for yourself'.<sup>127</sup> Volunteering to collect money was visible contribution to the war effort. The awarding of flags or badges allowed the giver's inclusion to be visible.

Wearing a badge, as a symbol of involvement or support for a cause, was a popular decoration as the war progressed. Frank Lockwood made a quick sketch of the Belgian badges in his diary:

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<sup>120</sup> Lockwood, IWM 96/52/1, diary entry for 24 April, 1915.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, entries for 26 June, 6 & 22 July and 7 August, 1915.

<sup>122</sup> *Huddersfield Daily Chronicle* (hereafter *HDC*), 28 June, 1915.

<sup>123</sup> *CDN*, 17 October, 1914.

<sup>124</sup> *HDC*, 28 June, 1915.

<sup>125</sup> Coules, IWM 97/25/1.

<sup>126</sup> Brittain, *War Diary*, p. 179.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*

The above drawings are of the little buttons which nearly everybody wears now. They denote that the wearer is contributing to the relief of a gallant people – the Belgians. The money is collected weekly in the mills and workshops & is devoted entirely to the Belgians who have been unable to leave their stricken country.<sup>128</sup>

A *Times* editorial of May 1915 noted that that among the many new customs induced by the war, the ‘most conspicuous of the acquired habits is the wearing of badges’.<sup>129</sup> Badges were not an innovation of the Great War. Rosettes and streamers, in colours representing political allegiance, had long been an embellishment of popular politics. In the South African War, during the celebrations following Mafeking, many wore a ‘B.P.’ badge, denoting ‘Baden-Powell’, the hero of the siege.<sup>130</sup> Yet in the Great War, the need to be *seen* as being committed and contributing was almost as important as the contribution itself. As we shall see in our discussion of ‘spy fever’, the element of recognition on the home front was vitally important.<sup>131</sup> The badge, rosette or armband announced inclusion in the cause. In the first weeks of war, territorial troops who had volunteered for foreign service were given red armbands to mark their decision<sup>132</sup>. Women were seen ‘displaying the crest of some loved one’s regiment’, proclaiming an emotional tie to the war.<sup>133</sup> Older men in the special constabulary sported a copper badge justifying their place at home.<sup>134</sup> For essential male war workers the chance to wear armbands, or even khaki uniforms in the case of the Liverpool dock workers in 1915, legitimised their non-combatant status and place in the war effort.<sup>135</sup> The *Brighouse Echo* claimed that ‘it was only found possible to keep men on the machines [*for war work*] by

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<sup>128</sup> Lockwood, diary entry for 17 July, 1915.

<sup>129</sup> *The Times*, 26 May, 1915.

<sup>130</sup> K. Good, ‘‘Perfect Saturnalia’’: Mafeking Night in Huddersfield and Lancaster’, unpublished MA dissertation, University of Lancaster, 1998.

<sup>131</sup> See Chapter Three, ‘‘Business as Usual?’’

<sup>132</sup> MacDonagh, *In London During the Great War*, pp. 30-31. Foreign service territorials were also given their typhoid inoculations. As MacDonagh noted, ‘the scarlet armlet is a badge of distinction, as well as a warning that wearers must not be treated roughly’.

<sup>133</sup> *The Times*, 26 May, 1915.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>135</sup> *The Times*, 12 April, 1915.

giving them a badge'.<sup>136</sup> But the 'numerous and exceedingly various designs' of these badges was enough to encourage confusion, scepticism and even resentment:

At all events it is now being urged that the wearing of badges has led to interference with the rapidity of recruiting. They have served as a cloak for unwilling men. Mr Lloyd George says there are hundreds of thousands of workmen wearing badges who ought never to have had them.<sup>137</sup>

Others felt that the use of badges for essential war work, regardless of official sanction, provided an undeserved status. F.A. Robinson felt that:

The policy now seems to play up to the British workman and flatter him that he is fighting his country's battles just as much in making the munitions of war, as the man in the trenches. The cases are entirely different; in the one case the man is highly paid and lives in safety and luxury (to him) at home, whilst the other is miserably paid and risks his life, his limbs, or his health every moment of the day and night.<sup>138</sup>

The debate reflected the tensions between the need for essential war workers and feelings that any men who did not wear uniform were shirking their duty. The wearing of badges answered the challenge to an extent, but could never match the wearing of khaki.

Lists of names in the Great War for the modern reader are forever associated with war memorials. Yet at the beginning of the war, the 'roll of honour' gave the names of men who had volunteered. Andrew Clark listed the local men of his village in service, and their respective regiments for the prayers of the parish.<sup>139</sup> The *Peterborough Citizen* listed the names and addresses of its early

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<sup>136</sup> *BE*, 30 July, 1915.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>138</sup> Robinson, diary entry for 16 March, 1915, IWM.

<sup>139</sup> Munson (ed.), *Echoes of the Great War*, pp. 6-7.

‘pals’, and in Cambridge volunteers were listed under the names of their ‘Patriotic Employers’, including the University Press and the Great Eastern Railway.<sup>140</sup> The *Crewe Chronicle* listed a comprehensive roll of honour, complete with occupations.<sup>141</sup> In the West Riding community of Silsden, a tablet with the names of all sixty-five men who had enlisted was erected in the town hall. The display of names made a family’s contribution to the war visible to contemporaries. MacDonagh, motoring through a Sussex village, ‘saw in the windows of several of the cottages a recruiting card of a kind which I have not noticed before’:

The card is circular in form and coloured red, except in the centre, where there is a white background for the inscription “Not at Home”. Around the circle are the words: “A man from this house is serving in the forces”.<sup>142</sup>

The motives behind such display were primarily pride. Alongside this was the obvious pressure brought to bear on those who could not answer with their own form of display – be it a ‘Belgian Day’ badge or a relative on the roll of honour. If the ‘war enthusiasm’ of 1914-15 looked inward at the community, then the developing systems of display were their outward expression. The home front sought inclusion – and acknowledgement of that inclusion – in the war effort.

#### V – *‘His English adopted parents & brother’ – The arrival of the Belgians*

If many in England wanted something to bring the war ‘home’, the arrival of Belgian refugees fleeing their war torn nation provided it. Belgium, as we have seen in the previous chapter, lay at the heart of British intervention. Whilst diplomatic historians might argue for the marginality of its influence on the decisions of Grey and Asquith, it undeniably caught the imagination of the populace and outflanked radical objections to the war. The incoming refugees from ‘brave little Belgium’ were visible and verbal proof to bolster the claims of

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<sup>140</sup> *PC*, 16 September, 1914; *CDN*, 2 September, 1914.

<sup>141</sup> *CC*, 5 September, 1914.

<sup>142</sup> MacDonagh, *In London During the Great War*, p. 60.

recruiting speakers, who warned of the same fate for Britain if the Germans made it across the channel. It also gave communities and individuals a chance to actively aid the war effort in a manner unmatched by charity contributions. Belgian refugees offered on their arrival the opportunity for another communal 'set-piece', proving the hospitality of a locality.

Great interest met the first waves of refugees. As Mary Coules wrote, '[e]veryone was Belgian mad for a time'.<sup>143</sup> MacDonagh, witnessing their arrival at Victoria station, evoked the arrival of the Huguenots several centuries before.<sup>144</sup> Yet the spectacle was unprecedented:

The Belgian refugees appear to be in a most pitiable state. I should say that all classes of society were represented in those parties which I saw, but the main bulk of them obviously were peasants – dark-complexioned and undersized, most of them. There were whole families – parents and several young children.<sup>145</sup>

A surge of sympathy ensued. The historian of Swindon recalled that 'the presence of the refugees created a more vivid realisation of the horrors of the war than any newspaper report could have done'.<sup>146</sup> The arrival of the Belgians in the provinces was eagerly anticipated. In Cambridge, crowds gathered to greet the town's first group of refugees in October 1914, and 'much disappointment' was felt when the scheduled train failed to show.<sup>147</sup> When they did arrive, 'many seemed obsessed with the terror of the Germans being on their heels', and their appearance betrayed that fear.<sup>148</sup> The press revealed that one woman had 'slept in the open on the ground' and another 'had not had a chance to do her hair or wash her face for several days'.<sup>149</sup> Public interest was strong, as the Belgians arrived in the middle of the Cambridge 'flag day' described above. Several hundred clustered around the station, and many 'cheered and waved

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<sup>143</sup> Coules, IWM 97/25/1.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>146</sup> Bavin, *Swindon's War Record*, p. 32.

<sup>147</sup> *CDN*, 17 October, 1914.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*

handkerchiefs and hats' as the refugees went to their lodgings. The women reportedly 'wept with joy' when they saw the rooms that had been provided.<sup>150</sup> In the same week, the *Keighley News* reassured its readers that the town would get refugees after all – there had been some doubt whether they would be taken so far north – and a new fund was launched to provide for them locally.<sup>151</sup> Upon their arrival, thousands descended on the railway station, and many bought cheap train tickets just to get access to the platform.<sup>152</sup> The Mayor, with a Catholic priest from Leeds acting as an interpreter, greeted the refugees and asked them to consider Keighley their 'second home'.<sup>153</sup> One of the Belgians replied that England was now 'our second fatherland'. The impact of the new arrivals was keenly felt:

The appearance of these unfortunate fugitives in our midst had brought home to our people the horrors and miseries of war in a way that hardly anything else could have done. It forces on the mind a recognition of what a German occupation of a country really means. Only a few short months ago these people were pursuing the ordinary round of work and recreation as comfortably and contentedly as we were.<sup>154</sup>

As the coming of the refugees was contemporaneous with the disgrace of the Keighley riot trial, the warm welcome the Belgians received helped to redeem local pride.<sup>155</sup> The press claimed that the reception was 'most excellent', and would 'be talked about long after the war'. It was 'little wonder that they [*the Belgians*] were touched in their turn by the cordial greeting'.<sup>156</sup> The *Keighley News* began printing a Flemish column and Keighley Picture House placed a large advert inviting the Belgians to attend. Nearly four hundred pounds had already been raised to provide for the fifty-one refugees, and the paper estimated that £500 would be the required amount to sustain them for a year. After the

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<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>151</sup> *KN*, 17 October, 1914.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>154</sup> *KN*, 24 October, 1914.

<sup>155</sup> For a description of the riot, see Chapter Five, 'The Violence of Belonging'.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*

hesitant response to the National Relief Fund, the generosity shown to the Belgians was a triumph:

So far, we can certainly take pride in the fact that not only the borough, but the whole Keighley district, has risen to the occasion. The town and district have never seen such an outburst of charitable enthusiasm, and it has been most gratifying to note the way in which practically all sections of our people have vied with each other in providing for these exiles in our midst.<sup>157</sup>

The neighbouring town of Bingley was so eager to receive its 'share' of Belgian refugees in early November that several false rumours of their arrival ran around 'all the mills and workplaces' leaving the crowds that turned up at the station disappointed.<sup>158</sup> The warmth and generosity of feeling is not just the proud 'narrative' of the local press, as the lists of subscribers showed the popularity of the Belgian cause. As the *Keighley News* noted, gifts and donations had come from 'all classes of the community, and help has been just as freely given by those who constitute the working-class community as those who are in better worldly positions'.<sup>159</sup>

Despite the support from all classes of society, there were great pains taken to ascertain the social class of the refugees, and ensure that they continued to be among their counterparts in Britain. The *Crewe & Nantwich Observer* felt it was best to place refugees with 'a party of somewhat equal standing, because it would be obviously impossible to carry on a home with a mixture of different classes of people'.<sup>160</sup> To place two separate social classes together 'would be tantamount to asking an agricultural labourer's family to feel at home in same house with people formerly rich', obviously an outrageous proposition.<sup>161</sup> In Cambridge it was noted that the refugees were 'all of a superior class'.<sup>162</sup> The *Keighley News*

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<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 31 October, 1914.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, 7 November, 1914. Bingley had to wait two more weeks for its 'share'.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>160</sup> *Crewe & Nantwich Observer*, 31 October, 1914.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>162</sup> *CDN*, 17 October, 1914.

described them as ‘mostly of the better-class artisan type’, and listed their pre-war occupations.<sup>163</sup> Was this interest and concern class prejudice, or simply a desire to recreate a semblance of normality for their refugees? We must remember that the ‘unity’ celebrated on the home front drew classes together, but did not break down their differences. The listing of occupations also emphasised the ordinariness of the refugees, suggesting that their disrupted lives could become that of Britain if the struggle was not won.

Public support for the Belgian refugees, perhaps emulating the increasing ‘banality’ of war, could not continue as casualty lists mounted and the war dragged on. As early as October 1914, F.A. Robinson was in a less charitable mood:

One meets numbers of Belgian refugees about the streets – many of them look as if they should be in the fighting line and not loafing about London; on the other hand, some of the women in widows weeds present a sad spectacle.<sup>164</sup>

Therein lay the problem. The public appeared to be too smitten with the *Punch* cartoon images of defiled women and helpless children, rather than the reality of long term assistance for the refugees. The *Brighouse Echo* reported that most of those offering housing expected orphaned children, rather than complete families.<sup>165</sup> In the Cheshire town of Nantwich the reality – in this case a party of nineteen refugees – was almost an anti-climax:

Some people in Nantwich seemed to be awfully disappointed because the party of Belgians, who arrived on Tuesday night, were not in rags and tatters. It seems incomprehensible to many that these refugees should be dressed in smart clothes. “Before I give anything I want to see what the

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<sup>163</sup> *KN*, 24 October, 1914.

<sup>164</sup> Robinson, diary entry for 19 October, 1914, IWM.

<sup>165</sup> *BE*, 16 October, 1914.



Belgians are like”, is a most frequent reply given to the ladies who have been collecting for the fund during the last week.<sup>166</sup>

Distrust and resentment increased, and as Trevor Wilson revealed, Belgian refugees were subject to suspicion by the public and even the police by 1916.<sup>167</sup> Andrew Clark heard from a neighbouring doctor who suspected that the wounds of the local convalescing Belgian soldiers were self-inflicted.<sup>168</sup> Mary Coules, regardless of her career as a ‘Black Domino’ refugee fundraiser, was less enamoured by late 1915:

[T]he Belgians are not grateful. They won’t do a stroke of work & grumble at everything & their morals...! It may be true enough that Belgium saved Europe, but save us from the Belgians! As far as I am concerned, Belgianitis has quite abated.<sup>169</sup>

‘Belgianitis’ certainly waned as the war progressed, perhaps more because the level of charitable endeavour of 1914 was not sustainable as conflict became more arduous. In the ugly, suspicious atmosphere of the home front from late 1916 onwards, the memory of ‘brave little Belgium’ had faded from its 1914 heyday.

One cannot understand England at war in 1914-15 without taking into account the wave of popular feeling for Belgium. As a narrative of the ‘pluck’ of a small nation it inspired the sympathy and appreciation of the home front as Britain’s own forces prepared for battle. As an example of German ‘Kultur’ it offered a terrifying threat – that the fate of the Belgians could be echoed on this side of the channel. Thus the Belgian refugees were one of the causes which held most resonance in the plethora of charities in the first months of war. Whilst inevitable tensions grew, we should not doubt the integrity of those who gave money, clothing and housing for the refugees. *King Albert’s Book*, published in

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<sup>166</sup> Crewe & Nantwich Observer, 31 October, 1914.

<sup>167</sup> Wilson, *The Myriad Faces of War*, pp. 402-403.

<sup>168</sup> Munson (ed.), *Echoes of the Great War*, p. 46.

<sup>169</sup> Coules, IWM.

Christmas 1914 by *The Daily Telegraph*, collected artwork, poetry and messages of goodwill to Belgium from those of ‘better worldly positions’. The contributors ranged from Asquith and Kipling to Monet and Debussy. The dedication inscribed by the Jowitt family of Halifax in the front of one copy bought as a gift for a refugee reads:

To Harry Heyndrickx, as a souvenir of his enforced exile in England, as a wounded soldier, after his voluntary service with the Belgian Army (Aug-Oct 1914.) In affectionate remembrance from his English adopted parents and brother.<sup>170</sup>

The ‘adoption’ of Belgium was a major element of ‘war enthusiasm’. The war required sacrifice, generosity and seriousness of purpose. The cause of the Belgian refugees demanded these qualities, and in the first year of the war, England was not found wanting.

## VI – Conclusion

‘Settling Down to War’ was an ambiguous phrase. Did it suggest a nation accepting of the situation and steeled for conflict? Or was it that the excitement of August 1914 was only transitory, and that the public had slipped back into their old ways as the months passed? This question had certainly not been resolved by May 1915, and in the period of acrimony that followed the war, accusations that sections of society had lacked commitment were levelled from all sides. Soldiers accused civilians, the middle class blamed the working class, and the working class pointed to the profiteers. In the chronological range of this study the first shock of war was being felt, rationalised and lived through. The response to recruitment and charitable call – across gender and class – was impressive. To maintain this, the importance and proximity of the war had to be continually renewed and emphasised. Events such as the departure of troops, the arrival of refugees and the numerous ‘flag days’ provided the sites of this

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<sup>170</sup> H. Caine (ed.), *King Albert's Book: A tribute to the Belgian king and people from representative men and women throughout the world* (London, 1914). The inscription was found in my second-hand copy.

renewal. Underpinning these events were the means to display inclusion in the war effort, on every level from a civilian buying a Belgian badge to a town measuring its Relief fund totals against its neighbours. The nation seemed to be attaining the aspirational ideal that press, platform and pulpit spoke of so persuasively. But were the shackles of Edwardian Britain shed so easily? The following chapter discusses some of the failings and divisions that threatened to undermine 'war enthusiasm'.

### Chapter Three

#### *'Business as Usual'?*

In the previous chapter we have seen how 'war enthusiasm' was expressed through charity and pageantry. The emotions surrounding events such as the departure of troops, the 'Flag Day' fundraisers and the arrival of Belgian refugees constituted 'war enthusiasm' at its best. The nation was committed and unified but unfettered by the unstable bellicosity witnessed in Berlin. 'Business as usual' a phrase coined in the first days of the conflict, epitomised this composed, measured response to the war. Yet we have concluded that the twin ideals of 'calm' and 'unity' were ultimately incompatible. Business could not carry on 'as usual' if the higher demands of sacrifice – across all sections of society – were to be met. This chapter examines some of the points at which the balance between 'calm' and 'unity' was unstable. May 1915 marks the end of this period of 'business as usual'. The need for a 'total war' approach was required, as the pre-war political and economic parameters proved increasingly inadequate. The tensions began as early as the August Bank Holiday, as food prices soared under a rush of panic buying. Beyond this early crisis, the adaptation of peacetime system to a wartime economy caused dislocation, sometimes to the advantage of trade, sometimes to its ruin. The 'unity' exemplified by the House of Commons on 4 August was unprecedented, yet the spectre of partisanship was only in abeyance, rather than forgotten forever. Demand for news of the war, and the frustration of that demand, inspired a rash of rumours, leading to hysteria over military defeat, spies and German atrocities. Returning soldiers added their own views, on trench conditions to military strategy. Throughout this chapter we can see the beginnings of our modern day 'rolling narrative', as well as some of the ideas and opinions discarded, absent from our dominating cultural perceptions of the war.

## I - *The Rush on Food*

The most obvious strain on the unity of the communities in the first days of war was panic buying. The rush on food began before the declaration of war, due to widespread fears about the impact on supplies of a conflict in mainland Europe. Though the food prices generally levelled out by mid-August and the panic began to fade, the rush on food formed the major domestic issue of the days around the crisis period. The duration of the panic was fleeting - Mary Coules recalls only 'a few maniacs' that indulged in mass buying - yet in early August it was the main threat to the ideas of 'calm' and 'unity'.<sup>1</sup> In many ways, the rush on food could be said to have created the debates on calm and unity. The panic was irrational, and detrimental to the efforts of those who sought to keep 'business as usual'. It undermined the unity of a community by its main perpetrators - the 'well-to-do' - and its victims - 'the poor'. The visibility of the act of 'laying in stores' led to heightened tensions, and the perceived culpability of the shopkeepers resulted frequently in violence. Such disruption sat uneasily with the unified nation that was espoused in the press and on the platform. The extent of panic buying differed across England. Some towns found that the buoyancy of other trades in their locality calmed their anxieties, whilst the more uncertain communities saw alarm on a wider scale. This section examines the reactions to the rush on food, and its implications for the 'community' at war.

In the previous chapter, we have seen how projections over the dislocation of manufacturing economies affected the mood of those contemplating war in 1914. Before 4 August, panic buying was well underway, and expected. In Grimsby, Friday 31 July saw the last foodstuffs arrive on returning steamers from Antwerp and Rotterdam, prompting a concerted rush on supplies. As the *Grimsby Daily Telegraph* reported, 'Saturday night was probably the most profitable night Grimsby grocers have ever experienced'. Reports such as this could only inflame the panic, as one man was rumoured to have purchased 'sufficient provisions to last him and his family three months'.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> M. Coules, unpublished notebook, IWM, 97/25/1.

<sup>2</sup> *Grimsby Daily Telegraph* (hereafter *GDT*), 3 August, 1914.

The following day, the paper was sure that the demand for food was much greater than during the South African War, and one local politician felt the need to purchase a large amount of flour for Grimsby children. Butter was up 4d. a pound, sugar had doubled in price and bacon was 2d. dearer.<sup>3</sup> The *Cambridge Daily News* printed a lecture by W.T. Layton, the former assistant secretary to the Royal Commission on Food Supply in Time of War, on the dangers of hoarding. He encouraged people to '[a]ct as you always act' with food. He also assured his audience that four months of wheat remained, and that Ireland would prove 'our great larder for meat, butter and eggs'.<sup>4</sup> It became clear that in Cambridge that few were following Layton's advice. On 4 August a letter from Mr. J.E. Purvis, of Corpus Christi College' revealed that '[a]n hour ago I heard a lady asking the price of a large quantity of flour with the evident intention of buying'. Purvis was not impressed; 'such action is unworthy and despicable at these times [...] it is inconceivable that there are many in Cambridge doing, or proposing to do, what this lady was doing'.<sup>5</sup> Fears over lack of foodstuffs were reaching alarming proportions. The *Peterborough Citizen* reported that '[p]essimists in the City are and have been drawing dismal pictures of Peterburians in a few months being reduced to living on bread substitutes and rats for meat'. The paper argued that such fears were 'probably exaggerated', but the repeated calls and endorsements for calm or 'level-headedness' reflected the escalation of the food panic.<sup>6</sup>

Upon the declaration of war, crowds massing outside shops were as common as those cheering in town squares. As Robert Roberts recalled:

[...] soon public concern [*at the prospect of war*] yielded to private self-interest. A rush of customers to the shop gave us the first alarm - sugar, flour, bread, butter, margarine, cheese, people began frantically to buy all the food they could find the money for.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 4 August, 1914.

<sup>4</sup> *Cambridge Daily News* (hereafter *CDN*), 3 August, 1914.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 4 August, 1914.

<sup>6</sup> *Peterborough Citizen* (hereafter *PC*), 5 August, 1914.

<sup>7</sup> R. Roberts, *The Classic Slum* (Manchester, 1971), p.186.

There were, of course, those that could find far more money than the customers of the Roberts' Salford store:

Soon we heard loud protests from people returning laden from the large shops - 'stuck-up-folk', they reported (the middle class), were coming from the suburbs with horse and trap, bassinettes and even go-carts, buying up sugar and flour by the half sack.<sup>8</sup>

That those with money were at the forefront of the food panic was embarrassing for those who feared the conduct of the 'masses' on the outbreak of war. Would tensions erupt in the wake of this flagrant display of self-interest? The *Barrow News* declared that those who hoarded were 'injuring their country and their fellow countrymen and women'. The paper reminded readers that, locally, 'there was little fear of any scarcity of food'. However, the prices of flour and sugar were changing three times a day. That hoarding was a 'selfish folly' was advice that 'could be more scrupulously observed in Barrow'.<sup>9</sup> The *Cambridge Daily News* letters page was filled with complaints.<sup>10</sup> A letter under the pseudonym N.O. Graball claimed that the incident reported by Purvis the previous day was 'not by any means an isolated incident [...] I am afraid there are more of these people than Mr. Purvis thinks'.<sup>11</sup> Other correspondents claimed that '[t]imes of great stress like the present serve to show up the unworthy section of the rich in their true labours, and open their eyes to their heartless indifference to other people's sufferings'.<sup>12</sup> The hoarding panic in Cambridge meant that prices varied hourly. Charles Porter, the head of the Cambridge ratepayers, criticised those responsible as 'strictly against patriotism', proving a 'great setback for the poor, who should not be handicapped in this way'.<sup>13</sup> As the week progressed, the panic in Cambridge seemed to be far from its conclusion:

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 186-7.

<sup>9</sup> *Barrow News* (hereafter *BN*), 8 August, 1914.

<sup>10</sup> *CDN*, 5 August, 1914.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

“They are as mad as ever,” the manager of a large local firm of provision dealers remarked to a “Cambridge Daily News” representative this (Thursday) morning [6 August]. At the time the shop was crowded with people who clamoured for large quantities of provisions.<sup>14</sup>

Those that did suffer from the hoarding of others would be taking a greater share in the fighting, according to some. A ‘Briton’, who wrote to the *Cambridge Daily News* dubbed the food hoarding as ‘cold-blooded, selfish murder’, as ‘those who will be first to feel the murderous onslaught of the hogs-with-money are of the class whence our soldiers and sailors are largely recruited, patriotic, unselfish and unfortunate’.<sup>15</sup>

Across the country, the extent of the rush on supplies varied. In Aldershot, there was a rush to buy stocks for the incoming troops, but ‘nothing of a panic’. A few engaged in hoarding over the Bank Holiday weekend, but ‘most of the residents showed a better spirit’.<sup>16</sup> By the following week, the paper could say that Aldershot had ‘splendidly maintained its reputation as a shopping centre, where anything and everything can be speedily supplied’. Aldershot prices were, the paper claimed, ‘well below those fixed by the government as the maximum’, with fresh fruit and vegetables easily available. Being a major garrison town, Aldershot was used to stocking ‘largely to meet military needs’.<sup>17</sup> In Grimsby, the unexpected arrival of a Danish butter boat from ‘Esbjærz’ [*sic*] was some help, but the price of foodstuffs was constantly rising.<sup>18</sup> In the nearby resort of Cleethorpes, there was anxiety about visitors being involved in the rush on food: ‘they are not only eating our food, but taking it home with them’, remarked the ‘Cleethorpes Gossip’ columnist.<sup>19</sup> Flour was the main panic provision in Huddersfield. By the 5 August, flour had risen to 2s. 6d. per stone from the previous day’s price of 1s. 11d. Flour stocks were cleared, and other commodities such as lard, sugar and bacon all inflated quickly in price.<sup>20</sup> One

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 6 August, 1914.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Aldershot News* (hereafter *AN*), 7 August, 1914.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 14 August, 1914.

<sup>18</sup> *GDT*, 6 August, 1914.

<sup>19</sup> *GDT*, 7 August, 1914.

<sup>20</sup> *Huddersfield Examiner* (hereafter *HE*), 5 August, 1914.



woman was said to have placed an order for £80 worth of provisions, including 100lb of tea.<sup>21</sup>

There are few accounts remaining from ‘food hoarders’, and not many would portray themselves in memoir accounts as the villain dragging away weeks worth of supplies in their car. Mrs. Purbrook from Essex remembered:

All English housewives immediately thought of food [...] My husband advised me to send a large order for groceries and to pay away no ready money [...] The provisions which we ultimately ordered were not much in excess of our usual order, and I was afterwards glad because we read in the newspapers that the fact of numbers of people trying to obtain large supplies of food was selfish and unpatriotic and likely to create panic.<sup>22</sup>

Vera Brittain wrote of how her parents left Buxton and ‘rushed over in the car to familiar shops in Macclesfield and Leek, where they laid in stores of cheese, bacon and butter’. She herself remembered how ‘habitually quiet and respectable citizens struggled like wolves for the provisions in the food-shops, and vented upon the distracted assistants their dismay at learning that all the prices had suddenly gone up’.<sup>23</sup> Opinion was divided on who was to blame for the rush on food. Whilst most guilty of hoarding could have only come from the more affluent sections of society, concern was also expressed about the ‘poor’, and their lack of reason in coping with the food shortages. W.T. Layton felt that ‘above all is needed advice to the working class housewife. Don’t start laying in stores at fancy prices, for fear of a shortage, for you may want all your money by and bye’.<sup>24</sup> A Mr. Eustace Miles argued that ‘a few leaflets could be scattered broadcast among the poor, advising them to masticate foods more thoroughly (and thus lessen the bulk needed) and practice gentle but deep and full breathing’.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 6 August, 1914.

<sup>22</sup> Mrs. Purbrook, unpublished notebook, IWM, 97/3/1.

<sup>23</sup> V. Brittain, *Testament of Youth: An autobiographical study of the years 1900-1925* (London, 1933), p. 96.

<sup>24</sup> *CDN*, 5 August, 1914.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 8 August, 1914.

The culpability of the shopkeepers was a controversial issue. There was early criticism of ‘unscrupulous food retailers’ in the *Cambridge Daily News*:

The “sharper” may find himself badly left if the public makes no outrageous demands on the better class of tradesman, so enabling to make the least possible advance on his tariff.<sup>26</sup>

There was an effort in the press to encourage people to patronise the ‘fair’ tradesman, who refused to profit from the increased demand. In Trowbridge in Wiltshire, the press linked the patronage of local shops with ‘local patriotism’, rather than the ‘thoughtlessness’ that led people to place orders from large stores in bigger towns.<sup>27</sup> One letter writer hoped that ‘every member of the public take the trouble to find out the trades who are “playing the game” and stand by them, not only now, but when the trouble is over, and we shall soon put things on a proper footing’.<sup>28</sup> E.H. Southgate, secretary of the Cambridge Ratepayers Association stated that it was ‘surely an absurd excuse for shopkeepers to say the raising of prices was caused by the purchase of large quantities of food by certain persons’.<sup>29</sup> Shopkeepers themselves responded by claiming that the spiralling prices were beyond their control. A wholesale merchant defended the price rise by claiming that stocks would have been cleared without the price rises.<sup>30</sup> Many blamed the hysteria of the public. Messrs. Matthew and Son of Cambridge related how ‘[p]eople were panic stricken [...] If people had gone on in the ordinary way, grocers would probably have had to put on prices a little more, but he did not think such increases as the present’.<sup>31</sup> Others claimed that misrepresentation by the press and rumour had created the wrong impression. One fraught shopkeeper wrote to Huddersfield’s *The Worker* paper:

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 5 August, 1914.

<sup>27</sup> *Wiltshire News* (hereafter *WN*), 14 August 1914.

<sup>28</sup> *CDN*, 7 August, 1914.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 8 August, 1914.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 7 August, 1914.

SIR - one or two newspapers are stating that there is no advance in the price of food, and that every half penny charged extra is robbery. We beg to say that this is a gross libel of the grocery trade. There has been an enormous rise in the price of all foodstuffs.<sup>32</sup>

The unrest that people feared did manifest itself on some occasions. The protracted anxiety and criticism of hoarding in Cambridge was in some respects a feeling that it was unpatriotic. Yet there was also an element of fear. Nearby examples of the rush on food erupting into violence were prominent in the Cambridge press. A riot in Bermondsey in East London, with the arrest of twenty women, suggested that violence could happen, albeit in a less salubrious neighbourhood than Cambridge.<sup>33</sup> A food riot in Hitchin in Hertfordshire was reported the following day. Police were forced to use batons to disperse the crowd, who later returned to the shop.<sup>34</sup> A speaker at the Cambridge Ratepayer's Association argued that the hoarders 'would have hesitated had they little seen the determined faces and heard the threats which lead to looting when many found necessary food beyond them on account of price'.<sup>35</sup> There were similar incidents in other parts of the country. In Long Sutton in Lincolnshire, customers threatened to raid the bakers for raising the price of loaves to 7d. per 4lb. The threat help reduced the price back down to 5d.<sup>36</sup> Cambridge itself saw a rush not only on food, but also on revolvers and other weapons. Was this, as one commentator asked, for the repulsion of an invading force 'should a foreign foe ever reach Cambridge?' Surely most realised, particularly in the light of the invasion of Belgium, that civilians would face serious reprisals if armed. Then was it for a purpose more sinister?

What then, is the alternative use for which they are intended? Is it to shoot down starving wretches seeking to obtain some of the food of

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<sup>32</sup> *The Worker*, 8 August, 1914.

<sup>33</sup> *CDN*, 6 August, 1914.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 7 August, 1914.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 8 August, 1914.

<sup>36</sup> *GDT*, 17 August, 1914.

which the greed of such people [...] seeks to deprive the poor. Such people are unworthy of the name Englishmen or Englishwomen.<sup>37</sup>

The nerve of those who purchased firearms in anticipation of starving crowds were never fully tested. After a few feverish days, the panic began to subside. Yet though the panic was over, prices remained high in the long term. As Arthur Marwick details, prices in February 1915 compared to the same month in 1914 were over seventy per cent higher for flour and sugar. Other commodities such as food and coal were also significantly higher than the previous year.<sup>38</sup>

The rush on food was the first major evidence of the outbreak of war in England. It was a brief period, yet in many ways drew the battle-lines of the homefront. There was hysteria and panic based upon rumour and hearsay. The shopkeeper was the earliest example of the profiteer, benefiting materially from others who had less agreeable roles in wartime. There was a conflict between classes, a sense of inequality brought into visible public space, leading to fears that the war would cause social unrest. The uncomfortable days of the rush on food soon passed, but the wider dislocation to the economy persisted. 'Business as usual', despite the assurances of its proponents, could not thrive in wartime conditions.

## II – '*Pounds, shillings and pence*'

We have seen in the first chapter of this study how economic considerations played a major role in debating the response to war. The principal arguments of the opponents of war were economic; Norman Angell's *The Great Illusion* claimed that war caused economic turmoil for both sides, and was thus unprofitable.<sup>39</sup> Economic uncertainties underscore the argument that the circumstances of locality shaped the response to war. Fears over the disruption to continental markets made the initial outlook bleak indeed for manufacturing districts, particularly in the textile industry. Resultant unemployment patterns heavily influenced early recruitment figures, as many men out of work had little

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<sup>37</sup> CDN., 5 August, 1914.

<sup>38</sup> A. Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War* (London, 1965), p. 42.

<sup>39</sup> N. Angell, *The Great Illusion*, (London, 1911).

option but to enlist. But the threatened economic collapse failed to materialise. As on the home front as a whole, a period of 'settling down' ensued. But the faith in 'business as usual' proved untenable for the demands of 'total' industrialised warfare. The state, famously peripheral in pre-war life, was forced to intervene.<sup>40</sup> Peter Dewey traces the development of state intervention and management of manpower, munitions and money across the war period.<sup>41</sup> Niall Ferguson has criticised that same state intervention, lamenting the 'advantage squandered' by the entente allies, who so heavily outweighed their enemies in wealth and resources at the beginning of the war.<sup>42</sup> The chronology of this study closes as the Ministry of Munitions was founded, and the grip of 'total' war was begun. This section examines the economic tensions of the first months of war, how some areas of the economy prospered, some trades adapted and survived, and some faced severe trouble.

In August 1914, economic hardship seemed the fate of many trades. The fears for the woollen industry in Huddersfield, drawing almost all of its custom from the continent, have been discussed in the first chapter of this study.<sup>43</sup> The early impact of the outbreak of war on the port city of Hull was grave:

The fishing industry almost died and some fish was actually landed by neutral trawlers. Nearly all the fish-and-chip shops were closed. Only 93 of the Hull trawlers were fishing, the Admiralty having taken 300 or more.<sup>44</sup>

Whilst the 'die-hards' in the press encouraged a Spartan purge of pleasure, Brighouse one of the major European centres for the silk trade, felt the lash of war on a 'luxury' industry.<sup>45</sup> 'Nobody wants silk today, for luxuries are banned'

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<sup>40</sup> A.J.P. Taylor, *British History 1914-45*, p. 1. Taylor begins by explaining that the individual's only contact with the state before the outbreak of war might have been catching sight of a policeman.

<sup>41</sup> P. Dewey, 'The new warfare and economic mobilization' in J. Turner (ed.), *Britain and the First World War* (London, 1988), pp. 70-84.

<sup>42</sup> N. Ferguson, *The Pity of War* (London, 1998), pp. 248-281.

<sup>43</sup> See Chapter 1, 'August 1914'.

<sup>44</sup> E. Gillet & K. MacMahon, *A History of Hull* (Oxford, 1980), p. 375.

<sup>45</sup> M. MacDonagh, *In London During the Great War* (London, 1935), p. 43.

bemoaned the *Brighouse Echo* in September 1914.<sup>46</sup> The silk trade looked forward to ‘the boom of trade, which is confidently expected to follow the war’, a boom they expected within the year.<sup>47</sup> Not all workers were so distressed by the trade dislocation. Frank Lockwood, a nineteen-year-old lithographer, cheerfully wrote in his diary:

Owing to the war firms (manufacturers etc.) all over the country are working short time, & the Colne Valley is no exception. We, at Netherwoods were playing this morning and next week until further notice we start at 9 o’clock and finish at 5 o’clock. We played at cricket all morning, and again in the afternoon.<sup>48</sup>

Neither was it simply large industries that faltered, small businesses paid a heavy toll. Resort towns such as Scarborough found their summer season ruined, with hotel and boarding house keepers suffering heavily.<sup>49</sup> In Cambridge, less than half the usual number of undergraduates enrolled, withdrawing much of the business that kept the town afloat. As the local press reported when looking back on the year 1914, ‘all classes suffered severely, particularly the lodging-house keepers, who had to face a very serious situation’.<sup>50</sup>

Some industries were in demand as soon as the war broke out. Whilst the idealist rhetoric of ‘war enthusiasm’ stressed a reinvention of Britain throughout 1914-15, some towns were already changing dramatically in the first days of war. Barrow’s thriving war industries resulted in a huge influx of workers. As early as 8 August the *Barrow News* appealed for townspeople to ‘assist in housing the workmen and thus render some small service to the country’.<sup>51</sup> The importance of the Vickers naval and munitions works ensured the boom was sustained. Within two years the town’s population had increased by ten thousand.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> *Brighouse Echo* (hereafter *BE*), 18 September, 1914.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> F.T. Lockwood, unpublished diary, entry for 15 August, 1914, IWM 96/52/1.

<sup>49</sup> *The Times History of the War*, Vol. II, p. 363.

<sup>50</sup> *CDN*, 31 December, 1914.

<sup>51</sup> *BN*, 8 August, 1914.

<sup>52</sup> N. Whiteside, ‘The British population at war’, in J. Turner (ed.), *Britain and the First World War* (London, 1988), pp. 84-98.

Overcrowding was the main problem Barrow had to face. Aldershot, an important garrison town, required a period of transition before the local economy righted itself:

As can well be imagined, the mobilisation greatly affected the labour market in Aldershot, and elsewhere, putting a very considerable extra strain on the Labour Exchange. In Aldershot this was very marked, there being an urgent demand for all sorts of civilian labour by the military authorities [...] No fewer than 800 civilian workers of all sorts were provided in two days.<sup>53</sup>

The war literally created a 'New Aldershot' as the local press termed it, 'with barracks crowded and teeming with life, such as no year in its history has witnessed'.<sup>54</sup>

Other trades took a few months to right themselves. Peter Dewey explains how industries adapted their output to become war industries as the conflict progressed.<sup>55</sup> The army was a great consumer. In Huddersfield, the August panic became little more than a brief aberration as government orders began to mount up. The first six months of 1914 had been mediocre for the woollen industry, but from late September onwards the outlook was much brighter – the woollen and worsted trades were 'relieved more than any other industry by government contracts'.<sup>56</sup> Factory workers were called on to work overtime even on Sundays. Demand for khaki cloth was unprecedented, and the town was estimated to be turning out two-hundred-and-fifty miles of khaki cloth a week.<sup>57</sup> The boom looked to have long-term prospects. In addition to the requirements of the British army, there were even more wartime markets:

[I]t is thought by many that we are only at the beginning of our trade with the Allies, of whom France and Belgium at any rate will look to this

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<sup>53</sup> AN, 14 August, 1914.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 21 August, 1914.

<sup>55</sup> Dewey, 'The new warfare and economic mobilisation', pp. 78-79.

<sup>56</sup> 'The state of employment', (1914), *Parliamentary Papers*, CD, 7755, XXI, p. 31.

<sup>57</sup> HE, 2 November, 1914.

country to meet the bulk, if not the whole, of their requirements for Army cloth. As for Russia, it is known that there is already a kind of undercurrent of enquiry [...] <sup>58</sup>

Huddersfield was reaping rich rewards from the war. As in Barrow and Aldershot, the prosperity contributed to ‘war enthusiasm’ – the town had a hard working and crucial role in the war economy. The benefits were being felt in all classes, from the profiting mill owners to the workers on overtime. Their contribution to the war effort was visible on the very soldiers that trained and fought at the front. Even the appearance of the district itself was altered:

The spectacle which presents itself any night in the week of the brilliant illumination of mills on the bleak hill sides and in the populous valleys is one which will not be soon forgotten by the present generation. <sup>59</sup>

Franck Lockwood described the mills as resembling ‘a cluster of fairy lamps standing out against the dark hillsides’. <sup>60</sup> Lockwood himself, the short-time cricketer, had less time to play as his lithography firm indirectly reaped the benefits of wartime demand. The shifting prices that grew out of the initial ‘rush on food’ meant more work:

The reason we have been so busy during the past week is that the price of sweets has gone up & we have had practically all J & W’s small cards to Litho. In 3 designs we did them, 1 for Gums, 1 for Toffees & the other for Jellies. 101 different kinds of sweets and every name to letter. <sup>61</sup>

Interest in the war also added to Lockwood’s workload. By December, the lithographers were ‘very busy with another edition of Mr. J.J. Jane’s “Fighting Ships”’, the third new edition in twelve months. Other companies met the entrepreneurial challenge of war. The Huddersfield firm Messrs. Benjamin

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<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> Lockwood, diary entry for 10 October, 1914.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, diary entry for 9 October, 1914.



Crook and Sons were purveyors of 'footballs and other athletic requisites' before the war.<sup>62</sup> As the debates raged over the playing of sport and the war, their leather factory produced haversacks for the French army. The company hoped 'that the new class of trade to which the firm have adapted themselves would be permanent', but that 'they will soon be engaged in it under the less exacting conditions which peace would bring'.<sup>63</sup> Moral reservations over the boom were discussed. Whilst the economic benefits were appreciated, the irony of the war prosperity could 'scarcely give unalloyed satisfaction'.<sup>64</sup> The vilification of war profiteer did not emerge until later in the war, but even in autumn 1914 the staunchly Liberal *Examiner* could not suppress its conscience:

It is certainly incongruous that we should be basking in prosperity when just across the narrow streak of water there separates this country from the mainland of the Continent of Europe the horrors and devastations of war are present in all their most poignant forms.<sup>65</sup>

Alongside the moral dilemmas of increased prosperity, there was a material loss to the war effort. For male workers on overtime the allure of the army, with its negligible pay and shambolic organisation, was easily resisted. From industries like the woollen trade the proportion of volunteers was accordingly much lower than less secure occupations.<sup>66</sup> The discrepancy was noted in an October recruitment meeting:

The Chairman said there had been some talk to the effect that physically capable men were staying at home and helping in the production of khaki, etc., were discharging their duty as fully as those who went to the front. The making of khaki was a duty, but it did not need the very best men in the world to make khaki. (Hear, hear.) If those who were physically capable went to the front khaki would still be made.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> *HE*, 2 November, 1914.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> P. Dewey, 'Military recruitment and the British labour force during the First World War', *Historical Journal*, 27 (1984), pp. 199-223.

<sup>67</sup> *HE*, 29 October, 1914.

The bustling economy of wartime boom could therefore be a hindrance when contribution to the war was measured in enlisted men. The woollen trade in Huddersfield was only one example. It was a problem that would require state intervention on a national scale.

‘Business as usual’, as Ferguson states, was based on certain expectations of the conflict, ‘an attitude which owed less to *laissez faire* dogma than to the assumption that Britain would be fighting an old-style naval war’.<sup>68</sup> Lifting a massive army of men – for a land war of several years – from the workforce would require a massive amount of planning. ‘Business as usual’ was a popular ingredient of the calm, determined image of Britain at war. As one Peterborough shop owner said almost defiantly, ‘though we are at war, we cannot shut up our shops and go to bed’.<sup>69</sup> But such plucky amateurism would not be enough to overcome an enemy like Germany. As Andrew Clark’s old soldier friend complained in March 1915:

James Caldwell dwells on the certainty that the war will be hard, prolonged and costly. From what he knows of Germany, he doesn’t for a moment believe Germany can be ‘starved’ out. The Germans are both foreseeing and methodical. Our way is very different: we do not provide for the future, and then when the sky falls in on us we try to pick ourselves out of the mess.<sup>70</sup>

The shell crisis of 1915 was certainly a mess. Over the first winter of war the B.E.F. was forced to fight with ‘only about three-fifths of the regulation amount *calculated on the experience of the Boer War*, and really little more than a day’s supply in modern battle’.<sup>71</sup> In his inter-war memoirs, Lloyd George stressed that he alone, acutely conscious of the shell shortage, fought a running battle with

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<sup>68</sup> Ferguson, *The Pity of War*, p. 255.

<sup>69</sup> PC, 16 September, 1914.

<sup>70</sup> J. Munson (ed.), *Echoes of the Great War: The diary of the Reverend Andrew Clark 1914-1919*, p. 50.

<sup>71</sup> A. Clark, *The Donkeys* (London, 1961), pp. 38-39, Clark’s own emphasis.

Kitchener's parsimony to bring the scandal to light.<sup>72</sup> But the Chancellor's retrospective self-justification neglects the fact that the machinery of war was only beginning to stutter into life. When Lord Northcliffe ran a headline in the *Daily Mail* entitled 'The Shells Scandal: Lord Kitchener's Tragic Blunder', there was disbelief and anger.<sup>73</sup> As Lloyd George recalls, the *Mail* and *The Times* 'were solemnly burned on the Stock Exchange', such was their temerity in criticising Kitchener.<sup>74</sup> As MacDonagh noted on 22 May, '[t]he fat was on fire and no mistake!'<sup>75</sup> But the reports kept coming from soldiers and observers, and the crisis helped make the country 'ripe' for the coalition group. In May 1915, 'Business as Usual' was dealt a crippling blow. Lloyd George's move to head the Ministry of Munitions signified the change. His 'sheltered valley' oration had been so definitive of the early, regenerative 'war enthusiasm' of August and September 1914. In a similar way, the Minister's speech to the engineering firms and trade unions in the summer of 1915 raised the curtain on a new phase of the war:

We are fighting against the best-organised community in the world; the best-organised whether for war or for peace, and we have been employing too much the haphazard, leisurely, go-as-you-please methods which, believe me, would not have enabled us to maintain our place as a nation, even in peace, very much longer. The nation now needs all the machinery that is capable of being used for turning out munitions or equipment, all the skill that is available for that purpose, all the industry, all the labour, and all the strength, power and resource of everyone to the utmost [...]<sup>76</sup>

The balance between 'calm' and 'unity', always fragile, had been disrupted. Victory would be achieved only if every cog in the machine was turning together. The rising of the nation from its pre-war sloth could only be consolidated by total immersion in the war.

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<sup>72</sup> D. Lloyd George, *War Memoirs*, Vol. I (London, 1938), pp. 112-127.

<sup>73</sup> *Daily Mail*, 21 May, 1915.

<sup>74</sup> D. Lloyd George, *War Memoirs*, p. 123.

<sup>75</sup> MacDonagh, *In London During the Great War*, p. 66.

<sup>76</sup> D. Lloyd George, *War Memoirs*, p. 155.

### III – ‘At the sound of the trumpet they all fell into line’

Eric Hobsbawm marks 1914 as the beginning of the ‘short’ twentieth century.<sup>77</sup> In terms of British politics, this division would appear precise. The nineteenth century political landscape of Gladstone and Disraeli, of Liberal and Tory hegemony, had been swept away by 1918. Landslide victors in 1906, the Liberals became the distant third party of British politics, never to hold office again. The Conservatives consolidated and developed their position, assuming the mantle of the ‘natural’ party of government as the century progressed. Labour, barely a quarter century since their inception as the I.L.P., emerged as the main party of the left. On the eve of war the Irish question saw opposing parties taking up arms. The Easter 1916 rebellion pushed the escalation of hostilities to newer scale of internecine violence and bitterness.<sup>78</sup> Contemporary politics are still shaped by the parameters marked out in the Great War. This section assesses politics in the first months of the Great War. It debates the role of politics in the ‘war enthusiasm’ for unity and a regenerated England. The discussion closes with the formation of the coalition government in 1915.

We have heard how the partisan divisions of the Edwardian era became a symbol of all that the regenerated England was not. The image of a nation casting away division to undertake a greater challenge was most evident in the sphere of politics. David Lloyd George argued that the Central powers had pressed for war on the understanding that Britain was beset by internal struggles. The fierce clashes in domestic politics over the South African War suggested that the nation could not unite over a war of such unprecedented size and cost. Yet in the hour of need such assumption proved erroneous:

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<sup>77</sup> E. Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes: The short twentieth century, 1914-1991* (London, 1994).

<sup>78</sup> For a concise overview of these events see J. Turner, ‘British politics and the Great War’, in J. Turner (ed.), *Britain and the First World War* (London, 1988), pp. 117-138; also M. Pugh, *The Making of Modern British Politics 1867-1939* (Oxford, 1982), pp. 161-181.

How little the Germans knew the temper of the British people! At the sound of the trumpet they all fell into line and wheeled against the common danger. There was not a perceptible break or gap in the ranks. This coming together of all creeds and sections to face a national peril was immediately reflected in the House of Commons. Its mood quickly changed.<sup>79</sup>

MacDonagh, present in the house in those early days noted 'the astonishing change in the mentality of the House! The stormy passions which raged up till last week on Home Rule are stilled'.<sup>80</sup> On announcing the ultimatum, the house 'was a wonderful example of restraint and seriousness'.<sup>81</sup> The 'terrific roar of applause' followed Asquith's solemn statement of conscience and conviction – in the Commons there was the clearest indication that it was the newly found unity and purpose that was celebrated, not the prospect of war.<sup>82</sup> The appointment of Kitchener, as a soldier without party allegiance, reflected the priority of the war over political rivalries. Across the country politicians rushed to stand alongside their rivals on the platform, trade unions called off strikes, and the leading Suffragettes came out in favour of the war. In his memoirs, Lloyd George treasured the memory of the days when '[m]en of political parties and unions left their badges at home joined the new fraternity of sacrifice'.<sup>83</sup> Two days after the declaration of hostilities, Cambridge liberals resolved to 'do their utmost' for the local war effort, 'entirely irrespective of party considerations'.<sup>84</sup> As recruitment meetings were being organised, the *Peterborough Citizen* applauded the 'astonishing unity of all parties, classes and creeds, such as we have not witnessed for generations'.<sup>85</sup> The decision to postpone the November municipal elections was welcomed. In Barrow the attendant expense would be wearisome, and it was felt that there would be little desire for the clash of party politics in the hour of a greater crisis:

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<sup>79</sup> D. Lloyd George, *War Memoirs*, vol. I, p. 129.

<sup>80</sup> MacDonagh, *In London During the Great War*, pp. 6-7.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>83</sup> D. Lloyd George, *War Memoirs*, vol. I, p. 129.

<sup>84</sup> *CDN*, 8 August, 1914.

<sup>85</sup> *PC*, 26 August, 1914.

We must avoid all politics, and so far as Barrow is concerned it would be a gracious act if the returning members were allowed a walk-over. It would be unbecoming at such a time to rake up sores that would cause ill-feeling. Let us be for once a united municipality just as we are a united nation. A contested election would certainly cause no interest, and the town can well be spared the cost of one.<sup>86</sup>

The retreat of party was refreshing, and decidedly popular. One of the attractions for an advertised recruitment meeting in Grimsby was that '[n]o politics would be allowed'.<sup>87</sup> A columnist for the *Essex County Chronicle* declared:

I am one of those who think that this terrible war is many ways going to do old England good. Political differences were getting too spitefully mean, and the fact that we are all – Conservative and Liberals – Englishmen, and have an equal stake in the country, was seemingly forgotten.<sup>88</sup>

F.A. Robinson wrote approvingly on John Redmond's vote of sympathy for the Belgians in August 1914, 'This comes from a man who a few weeks ago was looked upon as a traitor and enemy! Thus has the war united the people in a common bond'.<sup>89</sup> The early declaration of support from the Boers drew further incredulity, proving the Kaiser was even 'uniting Boer and Briton'.<sup>90</sup>

We have seen how the great bulk of anti-war opinion dissolved on the issue of Belgium. Mainstream political dissent, as we shall see, was based on the assumption that the war was not being pursued with sufficient drive and organisation. Anti-war meetings in the first months of the conflict were very much of the margins. In Huddersfield socialist anti-war meetings carried on well into August, with no evidence of disruption or criticism. On 16 August, a Hobsonite critique of imperialism and war was 'attentively heard' by local ILP

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<sup>86</sup> *BN*, 29 August, 1914.

<sup>87</sup> *GDT*, 31 August, 1914.

<sup>88</sup> *Essex County Chronicle* (hereafter *ECC*), 16 October, 1914.

<sup>89</sup> Robinson, diary entry for 26 August, 1914.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, diary entry for 12 September, 1914.

and socialist members.<sup>91</sup> A lively meeting the following week saw J.B. Hudson of Manchester espousing views ‘in the company of Hyndman and Blatchford’, the pro-war socialists.<sup>92</sup> The chair of the meeting hastily stated that Huddersfield socialists did not hold such opinions, and ‘opposition of a very strong character’ met the speaker.<sup>93</sup> Neither meeting merited any comment from the town’s main paper, the *Examiner*. Even speeches by Ramsay MacDonald, invariably at ticketed meetings, were not treated with much alarm by the authorities. One ILP member, distressed by MacDonald’s views, gave evidence to the local police. MacDonald was reported as saying he ‘assumed that no member of his audience would lend an ear to the “high faluting nonsense” [*sic*] as to enlisting in His Majesty’s Army or Navy’.<sup>94</sup> The member in question, a Miss Boston, told the police that ‘the speech was most mischievous, calculated to do vast damage [*and*] she did not remain to hear the resolution’.<sup>95</sup> The Home Office concluded, however, that the speech was ‘merely a case of desultory talk’ and merited no action.<sup>96</sup> With no evidence of a concerted campaign to hamper recruiting, the Department of Public Prosecution advised that an arrest would be ‘impolitic’.<sup>97</sup> The remaining Home Office files on ‘anti-recruiting and peace propaganda’ read less as a record of heroic pacifist struggle, than as a catalogue of local eccentrics. Their persecutors were often of the same ilk. A Cornish police sergeant’s hysterical expose of the exploits of Edwin Clogg, who had distributed pages from *The Labour Leader*, did not persuade the county’s chief constable to investigate further.<sup>98</sup> A letter of apology from Clogg in September 1914 survives, renouncing his anti-war stance and claiming that he gave out the leaflets ‘rather as a joke’.<sup>99</sup> William Halliday made regular anti-war speeches in the Bull Ring market in Birmingham.<sup>100</sup> Despite evidence of heckling crowds, the Birmingham Chief Constable advised that he was ‘really a man of no

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<sup>91</sup> *TW*, 22 August, 1914.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.* 29 August, 1914.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> PRO HO45/10741/26375/8.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> PRO HO45/10741/26375/10.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>98</sup> PRO HO45/10741/26375/17.

<sup>99</sup> PRO HO45/10741/26375/19.

<sup>100</sup> PRO HO45/10741/26375/15.

consequence', and no action was taken.<sup>101</sup> A rash of anti-war meetings in Leeds held in September 1914 inspired contempt rather than alarm in the local Chief Constable.<sup>102</sup> The speakers were 'of a low class', not linked to any party, and speeches were a jumble of anti-Prussian, anti-monarchy and anti-semitic sentiments.<sup>103</sup> National security was not at stake. The reactions of the police to these incidents might indicate a liberal tolerance of dissent in the local constabularies, but more likely highlights the peripheral nature of the early anti-war protests.

What was more resented were the cases in which pre-war divisions persisted in spite of Lloyd George's 'new Fraternity of sacrifice'. The persistence of industrial action could bring disgrace on a community that sought to present a united front. A strike in the Brighouse silk mills reflected badly on employers and workers alike:

It means loss and privation and physical suffering, even where nothing worse occurs, and it stands to the discredit of the town that it should appear almost if not entirely one as a place where domestic differences cannot be composed at such a momentous period of the nation's history.<sup>104</sup>

Silk had been hit hard by the war, and the slump exacerbated the strike conditions, with employers refusing to reopen until the trade recovered. Consequently the dispute continued, and the press regretted that 'in the midst of all this unity for the furtherance of great purpose there is one spot where strife reigns'.<sup>105</sup> Industrial action indicated that the new unity was just a façade. F.A. Robinson was furious with the threatened strike of the munitions workers on the Clyde in February 1915. Robinson conceded that 'the men perhaps naturally want to share in the prosperity' but the demands of war should have been paramount:

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<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>102</sup> PRO HO45/10741/26375/18.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> *BE*, 18 September, 1914.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 25 September, 1914.



Considering how badly the country stands in need of the things these men produce, it is an unpatriotic and disgraceful proceeding, but one can only say "it is just like them".<sup>106</sup>

Upper and middle class scepticism over the contribution of the skilled working class was a growing product of the early months of 1915. Robinson felt that the Clydeside workers showed 'a very bad spirit' and compared their actions with the contribution of money and men from the universities.<sup>107</sup> The survival of political difference seemed to have even less justification. A Grimsby councillor who objected to the arbitrary selection of the relief fund committee was shouted down by the vicar of the town, who cried 'we are not partisans, we are one body, sir!'<sup>108</sup> In Keighley the local Labour leaders refusal to accompany Conservative and Liberal figures on the recruitment platform aroused contempt even from their own party. One member wrote indignantly in the press that the nation should be held above politics, but also felt Labour's position would be detrimental to their post-war status.<sup>109</sup> 'To shirk our share of the work because of theoretical objections,' he argued, 'was to nullify any influence we might have in securing a lasting settlement on just lines.'<sup>110</sup> On a national scale, Conservative and Unionist discontent was growing, particularly with the passing of a suspended Home Rule bill, to be made law when the war was concluded.<sup>111</sup> Though Asquith ridiculed the anger of Bonar Law and the Unionists, public opinion was more understanding. The *Brighouse Echo* spoke for many in arguing that the Liberals 'grossly abused' the Unionist observance of political truce.<sup>112</sup> Robinson remembered unfavourably the conduct of the Liberal opposition in the South African conflict:

[T]his is the first time since the Armada that this country has gone to war with the support of all parties. In the last war we were engaged in viz.

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<sup>106</sup> Robinson, diary entry for 26 February, 1914.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, diary entry for 3 March, 1914.

<sup>108</sup> *GDT*, 13 August, 1914.

<sup>109</sup> *Keighley News* (hereafter *KN*), 3 October, 1914.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>111</sup> Marwick, *The Deluge*, p. 40.

<sup>112</sup> *BE*, 18 September, 1914.

The Boer War, the Unionist Government were continually harassed by the Opposition and one does not like to think what might have happened if such a thing had occurred now.<sup>113</sup>

The liberal administration could only count on the loyalty of the Unionist opposition as long as the war was being run efficiently.

By May 1915 this no longer held true. We have seen in the previous section how the shortage of shells on the western front led to the formation of the Ministry of Munitions, to organise and improve output. Added to the resignation of Lord Fisher from the Admiralty over the failure of the Dardanelles campaign, it hastened the demise of the Liberal administration. Just as 'business as usual' proved untenable with the war economy, so the continuance of a peacetime government in war was equally unacceptable. The coalition consolidated the rejection of Edwardian divisions, reflecting the interests and ideas of all parties. MacDonagh approved:

This is all to the good. It must contribute to the vitality of the Government as well as to its stability. War cannot be waged on political principles. In the present tremendous crisis the aims of parties have become trivial – even meaningless [...] The National Government, as it is called, represents the fibre and spirit of the country instead of the narrow temper and clash of Party.<sup>114</sup>

But despite the symbolism, old rivalries remained. Churchill, who lost his position in the May coalition, felt in the 1920s that August 1914 'was the moment to have proclaimed National Government and National Service together'.<sup>115</sup> The conduct of the war had allowed bitterness on both sides of the commons to develop. Asquith's political dealings over personnel ensured that the Liberals still held sway in the key positions, but his tenure as Prime Minister

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<sup>113</sup> Robinson, diary entry for 15 December, 1914.

<sup>114</sup> MacDonagh, *In London During the Great War*, pp. 68-69.

<sup>115</sup> W. Churchill, *The World Crisis* (London, 1922), vol. I, p. 482.

would not survive the war. With the backing of the Unionists, Lloyd George became Prime Minister in 1916.

Division had been the dominant theme of British political life before 1914. Issues such as the South African conflict, tariff reform and Home Rule had caused splits within, and between, parties during the twenty years before the war. The redemptive effect of the outbreak of war on these political rivalries was immense to contemporaries. In national and local spheres, the machinery of political schism, well oiled by the turbulence of previous years, was harnessed to the larger engine of national need. That turnaround alone seemed momentous. In some cases the change was only cosmetic – animosity extinguished in the August ‘crisis’ stirred and smouldered as the months passed. The instant achievement of internal unity was not matched by a rapid victory. ‘Business as usual’ in political life was proving as unwieldy as in the field of commerce, and the coalition government seemed to sweep away any residual party battle lines. In charitable works, in recruitment and in the very army that Britain was training for the field, the old boundaries had been shed. By May 1915 it seemed that the corridors of power had finally been purged of pre-war strife.

Outside of Westminster, the tangle of government posts seemed to arouse little concern. Lack of interest in party politics had been, if not a dominant, then certainly an identifiable strand of public opinion since August. The coalition ‘caused a sensation in political circles’, noted MacDonagh, but he felt ‘bound to confess that, generally speaking, the public do not seem to be much concerned about it – one way or the other’.<sup>116</sup> Kitchener, one of the main culprits of the shell crisis in the opinion of Lloyd George and Churchill, lost none of his popularity. Vera Brittain gave a cursory comment in her diary, conceding that she had not ‘been able to follow all through its intricacies’, though she wrote that ‘everyone seems glad’ about Lloyd George’s appointment.<sup>117</sup> Her thoughts were fears for those she knew at the front, and need for news of the war. How Brittain, and millions like her, sated these desires is the subject of the next two sections.

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<sup>116</sup> MacDonagh, *In London During the Great War*, p. 68.

#### IV – ‘Let us taste the bitter stuff’ - Press censorship

One of the main themes in the work of seminal combatant writers such as Graves or Blunden was that the public knew so little of the ‘truth’ of the war. It was the documentary nature of the work of Sassoon and Owen, the unforgettable imagery of war, which shocked contemporaries and resonates with the modern reader eight decades on.<sup>118</sup> Inter-war commentators such as Arthur Ponsonby blamed the press for the naïve enthusiasm for war among civilians so resented by the soldier-poets. In his tract *Falsehood in Wartime*, Ponsonby argued that newspapers manipulated public opinion throughout the war with propaganda that endorsed the government and inflamed the passions of the people.<sup>119</sup> Is this how the public learnt about the key events and conditions of the conflict? The central source of this study is the newspaper, primarily for clues to public opinion and reaction to the war on the home front. But these responses were informed by the representations of the war on the continent provided by the very same press. ‘Business as usual’ in politics had been overturned by the cessation of party hostility. In the economy *laissez faire* conditions were rendered redundant first by the distribution of government contracts, then by the state organisation of munitions. For the press there could be no transition period, no gradual shift to state influence. The Defence of the Realm Act of 1914 immediately established labyrinthine guidelines for the publication of news that could in any way be detrimental to strategy or morale.<sup>120</sup> The contradiction of the forces of liberty censoring their own press to win the war was not lost on contemporaries:

In it [*the Great War*] democracy was on trial, and democracy won, but the victory, in respect of some liberties, as in other and greater matters, was purchased at a price. Two ideals were at grips in the long and deadly

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<sup>117</sup> Brittain, *Chronicle of Youth: War Diary 1913-1917* (London, 1981; A. Bishop ed.), p. 202.

<sup>118</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the divide between soldier and civilian see Chapter Six, ‘The Realities of War’. A specialist survey of the literary impact of war can be found in S. Hynes, *A War Imagined: The First World War and English culture* (London, 1990).

<sup>119</sup> A. Ponsonby, *Falsehood in Wartime: Propaganda, lies and the First World War* (London, 1928).

<sup>120</sup> E. Cook. *The Press in War-Time* (London, 1920), pp. 24-26.

struggle – the ideal of liberty and public right on one side, and on the other the ideal of a State organised on a basis of might.<sup>121</sup>

When Sir Edward Cook, who ‘cheerfully took up the undesired post of Press Censor’ during the war, wrote these words in 1919 he argued that the right balance had been upheld during the conflict.<sup>122</sup> In 1914-15 there was no escape for the press from this paradox. Too much information provoked panic and alarm, too little and the public was uninformed and less likely to enlist, contribute to or work for the war effort. This section examines the frustrations that maintaining that balance caused in the first months of war.

War correspondents already possessed an ambivalent relationship with the armed forces. The dashing forays of W.H. Russell in the Crimean War had inspired one military luminary to describe the military journalist as ‘the curse of modern armies’.<sup>123</sup> Thus it is perhaps not surprising that Kitchener, whose austere soldierly manner had already dismayed the cabinet, banned all war correspondents from the front in August 1914. The lack of news in the last week of August, when it was – rightly – believed that a key battle raged across the channel, was a palpable frustration. The *Keighley News* reported on the 29 August of the ‘profound disappointment’ locally at the lack of war news.<sup>124</sup> Many held that this lack of news was affecting the war effort. On the same day as Keighley’s disappointment, a *Cambridge Daily News* editorial called for more coverage:

What leads men to enlist? Patriotism, enthusiasm, the example of splendid deeds, the echo of the rolling drum and the bugle sounding the charge, the story of fellow-men gloriously faithful to death for their country. And who can best evoke this enthusiasm, chronicle this example, reflect this echo and tell this story? More than any other man or any other agency – a thousand times more – the war correspondent.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xi.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 193.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 15-16.

<sup>124</sup> *KN*, 29 August, 1914.

<sup>125</sup> *CDN*, 29 August, 1914.

Those hungry for news got their wish the following day. A few intrepid correspondents had disregarded Kitchener's order, and made it to the front. On 30 August *The Times* published a harrowing description of the British Expeditionary Force retreating from the Battle of Mons. The 'Amiens dispatch' had a famously wide impact, inspiring panic, outrage and scepticism. F.A. Robinson noted in his diary that *The Times* told how 'our forces have been fearfully cut up, and our losses are very great'.<sup>126</sup> Vera Brittain was another worried reader:

During supper Daddy & Edward read us a very dismal article in the *Sunday Times* speaking of the tremendous losses in the British Army & the apparent invincibility of the Germans all round. The situation seems very grave indeed.<sup>127</sup>

In Essex panic reigned. Rev. Andrew Clark reported how the Amiens despatch 'was so full of despair that Chelmsford people could not take their tea'.<sup>128</sup> The Press Bureau issued a stern rebuttal to allay fears. Asquith claimed *The Times* had been a 'regrettable exception' to the 'patriotic reticence' of the press.<sup>129</sup> H.A. Gwynne, editor of the Unionist *Morning Post*, opined to his owner that *The Times* 'had behaved abominably in publishing the message'.<sup>130</sup> Those who had craved more information doubted the veracity of the dispatch, but renewed their calls for press access to the front. For Andrew Clark, the 'official contradiction' that followed confirmed his own instincts that the dispatch had been a hoax.<sup>131</sup> In Cambridge the *Daily News* 'deeply regretted that any paper could be found to print such false and alarmist reports', and called for official war correspondents to ensure the truth was printed:

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<sup>126</sup> Robinson, diary entry for 30 August, 1914.

<sup>127</sup> Brittain, *War Diary*, p. 101.

<sup>128</sup> Munson (ed.), *Echoes of the Great War*, p. 11.

<sup>129</sup> *CDN*, 31 August, 1914.

<sup>130</sup> K. Wilson (ed.), *The Rasp of War: The letters of H.A. Gwynne to the Countess Bathurst 1914-1918* (London, 1988), letter dated 1 September, 1914.

<sup>131</sup> Munson (ed.), *Echoes of the Great War*, p. 11.

Do they [*the Press Bureau*] think that the heart of Britain has become so poor and weak a thing that it cannot stand the strain of truth? [...] We want no sugar-coated pills or powders concealed in jam. Let us taste the bitter stuff.<sup>132</sup>

But despite the disapproval, the call for ‘more men’ in the ‘Amiens dispatch’ was arguably the most effective recruiting appeal of the war. The article was published at the beginning of a week of unprecedented voluntary enlistment.<sup>133</sup> The ‘bitter stuff’, whether true or not, had encouraged many to act.

As ‘discontent became so great at the unnecessary state of ignorance in which the nation was being kept’, Kitchener was also moved to act, enlisting an army engineer, E.D. Swinton, as the official correspondent for the war.<sup>134</sup> The Earl had not entirely renounced his earlier reservations. In his memoirs Swinton acknowledged that his appointment was ‘a half measure’, an attempt by the army to retain control of war news.<sup>135</sup> Swinton’s press pseudonym ‘Eyewitness’ became synonymous with the cheery and banal reports that enraged both civilians and soldiers throughout the war. F.A. Robinson was constantly frustrated, and clearly saw through the façade. The Press Bureau was ‘treating the country as though it were an infant school’.<sup>136</sup> As the months passed, Robinson’s indignation grew. ‘The papers are as usual full from end to end of war “news”’, he wrote in October 1914, ‘but they contain absolutely no news about the war’.<sup>137</sup> He felt the press censorship was the cause of the apathy that he perceived on the home front:

As I have said often in these notes, there are a great many who share these opinions, and that the Government itself is very much to blame for the state of almost indifference with which the “man in the street” has come to regard the war.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> *CDN*, 31 August, 1914.

<sup>133</sup> For a discussion of the recruitment boom, see Chapter Four, ‘I will be a Man and Enlist’.

<sup>134</sup> E.D. Swinton, *Eyewitness* (London, 1933), p. 51.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>136</sup> Robinson, diary entry for 5 September, 1914.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 7 October, 1914.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 19 March, 1915.

War expectations played a part in these frustrations. Regardless of Kitchener's long term predictions, many still looked forward to 'the Day' when Britain's supremacy would be won in a vast naval confrontation. Others still held out for a Waterloo, a decisive land battle where the victor would be swept away. The rumours of Russians passing through Britain on their way to the western front, so constant in the early months of war, reflected the belief that the allies were building up to such a battle.<sup>139</sup> Such hopes were inevitably disappointed by the developing war of attrition. Until the Battle of Neuve Chapelle in 1915, there was little to tell – and of that episode no desire to tell. When recalling his role, the 'Eyewitness' accepted he had little opportunity to improve on his reputation:

I was a living contradiction of the truth of the saying – “You cannot have it both ways”: and I got it in the neck from each direction. For the professional, hundred-per-cent, hard-faced he-soldier man called me with scorn a “blank journalist”; and the professional pale-faced wielder of the pen with equal heartiness cursed me for a “blank blackleg”.<sup>140</sup>

Loathed by the by the press, and ridiculed by the soldiers was the fate of the army's official voice. Correctly, Niall Ferguson has undermined the assumption that the press fed a steady stream of propaganda that sustained and supported the government.<sup>141</sup> Much of the propaganda 'was not produced by governmental agencies at all, but by autonomous organizations or private individuals'.<sup>142</sup>

Ponsonby's image of a docile mass swallowing lies, disregards the fact thousands of that mass were themselves involved in the generation of those lies, as we shall see below. Neither was the press a mouthpiece of the government. The Northcliffe press produced a continual swell of pressure and criticism against whoever happened to be in charge of the war effort.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> See 'The Fog of Falsehood' section below for more details on the Russians rumour.

<sup>140</sup> Swinton, *Eyewitness*, p. 57.

<sup>141</sup> Ferguson, *The Pity of War*, pp. 212-247.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 226.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 230.



For the press, 'business as usual' was experienced in an almost opposite manner to that of the economy or politics. The press suffered state intervention as soon as the war began. May 1915 was less a watershed of government control than another chapter of the growing uneasiness between press and government. Their relationship can be characterised more as a continual, fractious negotiation over the correct way to conduct and report the war. The reading public was frustrated at the lack of news in the early months of the war. Yet we can see in the diary accounts of Robinson and Clark that the newspaper stories were not passively accepted, nor were they the only sources of information about the war. The evidence of genuine 'eyewitnesses' – soldiers from the front – did not exist in a vacuum and began to be written and voiced.

#### V – *'The terrors of the World War nearer'*

For all the anxieties over whether the public had realised the gravity of the war, there were countless who heard news from eyewitnesses and participants. The divide between combatant and civilian became a staple of post-war disenchantment, and consequently our 'rolling narrative' of war.<sup>144</sup> Those in 'Blighty' supposedly had no clue of the conditions in the trenches, their lack of knowledge exacerbating the bitterness of the returning soldier. Like many of our long held assumptions, this requires a certain qualification. We have seen in previous chapters how the war was widely expected, regardless of duration, to be incredibly brutal and bloody. It was a common refrain in the press to claim that the battle would dwarf Waterloo in men and munitions. Our assumptions over volunteers having no idea of what they were facing are not without foundation: the length of the war, trench conditions and poison gas had no place in the image of one massive glorious battle. But wounds and death were naturally contemplated, as C.E. Carrington, a volunteer in the early days of the war confirms:

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<sup>144</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the divide between soldier and civilian see Chapter Six, 'The Realities of War'.

Young soldiers who enlisted without expecting hardships and danger must have been foolish indeed; and any who misjudged the nature of army life were quickly introduced to the realities of the situation by the old soldiers. It can only have been a very stupid, insensitive, young man who did not concentrate his mind, sometimes during the long months of military training on blood and wounds. We were pretty well prepared for the horrors of war by the time we came to face them [...]<sup>145</sup>

Whilst the official 'eye-witness' accounts from the fighting were woefully short on news, there was plenty of information on wounds and fighting available on the home front. Returning soldiers had their own stories to tell. The local press was quick to print letters from local troops at the front and private correspondence revealed something of the horrors of the fighting. Letters from the front relieved of their strategic revelations nevertheless spoke of the hardships of the trenches. We must also recognise the overlapping values of a previous age. Descriptions and depictions of gruesome injuries and wounds, from the extraordinary to the mundane, were common in the Victorian and Edwardian era. The coverage of the 'Jack the Ripper' murders of the 1880s was marked with an almost prurient relish, and their tales of sexual mutilation anticipate the Belgian atrocity stories of 1914.<sup>146</sup> Less sensational but no less gruesome injuries, such as industrial accidents or the knife fights of slum gangs, were reported with a graphic frankness that shocks the modern reader. The portrayal of wounds gained by civilians in the East Coast bombardments did not flinch from proclaiming the horrors of shrapnel and shelling.<sup>147</sup> Consequently, early descriptions of battle underlined the possibility and proximity of violent death for any prospective volunteer. Neither was written description the only proof of the terrors of war. By the end of August the wounded from the Battle of Mons were returning, and wounds were visible. There were many more to follow. In the early months of war we can trace the beginnings of mourning and remembrance, which so dominate our modern day perceptions of the Great War.

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<sup>145</sup> C. Edmonds, *A Subaltern's War* (London, 1929; 1984 edition), p.11.

<sup>146</sup> See J. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of sexual danger in late-Victorian London* (Chicago, 1992), pp. 191-228.

<sup>147</sup> See Chapter Six, 'The Realities of War'.

The arrival of wounded troop trains proved the first confrontation with the effects of modern warfare. Casualties streamed in from the brutal early battles of Mons and the Marne. MacDonagh witnessed the arrival of wounded from Mons at Waterloo at the end of August 1914. 'There were no bad cases' he wrote, describing 'arms and legs in splints' and 'bandaged heads, faces and necks'.<sup>148</sup> But the sight was a sobering one:

The few chance spectators of the scene gave the soldiers cigarettes and cheered them sympathetically as the vans drove off. It was for civilians the first shock of war – the first experience of what war means.<sup>149</sup>

For communities, the first appearances of the wounded were causes of great curiosity, and afforded another civic 'set-piece' for a town to stage a welcome. The local press, free from the shackles of the censored battle reports, printed the comments and views of soldiers on the fighting. News of an approaching train of wounded on 31 August spread rapidly round Cambridge, and thousands were gathered in the vicinity of the station and along the route to Trinity College, where the men would be treated.<sup>150</sup> The atmosphere at the station was apprehensive, this being the day that followed the 'Amiens dispatch'. When the train drew up those waiting on the platform were treated to 'a hearty shout of greeting' from a soldier 'relieved to some extent the strain and gloom with which the arrival of the train had been awaited'.<sup>151</sup> The initial feeling 'was that things were not as bad as expected' as many of the soldiers were cheerful and friendly.<sup>152</sup> The train also carried the 'seriously hurt', some who 'had received from bursting shells frightful injuries, the nature of which was told on tickets pinned to their jackets' – these cases moved men and women on the platform to tears.<sup>153</sup> Some of the soldiers spoke of the battle. Many confirmed the atrocity stories of the Germans, particularly the use of civilians as a human shield. "You

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<sup>148</sup> MacDonagh, *In London During the Great War*, p. 19.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>150</sup> *CDN*, 1 September, 1914.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*

can't say anything too bad of the Germans"', said one.<sup>154</sup> Another private, a Scotsman, was derisive of their ability, claiming 'they couldn't hit a haystack where I was at Mons'.<sup>155</sup> As the troops were relayed to Trinity, the crowds that lined the streets 'waved handkerchiefs and cheered to the echo'.<sup>156</sup> Several weeks later a Red Cross train paused for twenty minutes at Peterborough, before continuing to their hospital in Lincoln. After the press reports and the rumours, here was the proof of war:

It brought the tragic realities of the war more realistically home to the minds of the people than anything else could possibly have done, for many of the men were very severely injured.<sup>157</sup>

One of the soldiers spoke of Mons and 'said he never wished to return to such a warm quarter again', whilst others verified more atrocity rumours.<sup>158</sup> Hearing from men 'with the breath of battle almost still on their lips' was a sombre experience, but the *Peterborough Citizen* assured its readers 'we can still feel proud of the brave men who, during those four awful days at Mons and Cambrai, wrought deeds of imperishable fame'.<sup>159</sup> Interest in the returning soldiers was fierce. In Braintree in Essex, the streets around the Red Cross Hospital were thronged with people to see the rumoured arrival of wounded. The rumour was false, but the 'expectancy of the street-crowd was brought to boiling point' by the coming and goings of uniformed staff.<sup>160</sup> Two thousand people turned out to greet the return of Private Arthur Conderson to the village of Wyke in the West Riding.<sup>161</sup> Wounded with shrapnel in his back and in his left eye, Conderson was inspected by General French whilst convalescing in France. His left eye was removed at a hospital in Chelsea, and King George himself, on an official visit, shook him by the hand.<sup>162</sup> Thus were the grand protagonists of war brought home to village and town.

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<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>157</sup> *PC*, 16 September, 1914.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>160</sup> Munson (ed.), *Echoes of the Great War*, p. 21.

<sup>161</sup> *BE*, 16 October, 1914.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*

Of course, the testimony of the wounded from the early battles did not speak of the horrors of trench warfare. From the first sight of the Uhlans at Mons to the successful stand within the earshot of Paris, theirs was a war of movement almost in the Napoleonic mode. Neither were these men the innocents who flocked to enlist – many of the B.E.F. had seen battle in the South African War, and their comparisons were instructive. Leonard Cornwall, speaking to the *Cambridge Daily News*, dismissed the Boer battles as ‘a mere “scrap” compared with the present fighting’.<sup>163</sup> A sergeant sharing a train carriage with Andrew Clark in November 1914 expressed similar sentiments:

The Boer War, he said, was ‘a picnic’ in comparison. In several of the actions he had seen more shells discharged in twenty minutes than he had seen in the whole course of the South-African War. He said that this war is ‘not fighting, but murder’.<sup>164</sup>

Descriptions of the war were unanimous in conveying the scale and ferocity of the fighting. A Brighthouse private wounded in the fighting at the Aisne, said the battle was ‘Hell on Earth’.<sup>165</sup> Another soldier told Andrew Clark ‘that it had been “just hell”’ at the battle.<sup>166</sup> The anxiety of the ‘Amiens dispatch’ no longer seemed false or alarmist after the eyewitness accounts. A letter home from a Coldstream guard was published in the *Crewe Chronicle* in October 1914:

There were only 400 left out of 1,200 to tell the tale. Everybody you meet say they are fed up with it. It is nothing but killing your fellow man. Men who were out in Africa say it was only a game of playing Boy Scouts. They say there are more casualties and more ammunition fired so far than there was in Africa in three years.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> *CDN*, 2 September, 1914.

<sup>164</sup> Munson (ed.), *Echoes of the Great War*, p. 33.

<sup>165</sup> *BE*, October 9, 1914.

<sup>166</sup> Munson (ed.), *Echoes of the Great War*, p. 20.

<sup>167</sup> *Crewe Chronicle* (hereafter *CC*), 10 October, 1914.

Other Crewe soldiers spoke of the gruesome sights of the battlefield, including mutilation and decapitation from shrapnel wounds.<sup>168</sup> One wounded Keighley man was frank in his assessment of the fighting:

They started shelling us as soon as 8 o'clock in the morning, and at dusk we had lost thirty-seven out of fifty in my trench. It was like a slaughter-house, and was full of blood.<sup>169</sup>

The ranks upon ranks of German infantry who fell to the rapid fire of the British troops at Mons were a common component of the eyewitness accounts. Walter Raleigh, giving a lecture on 'Might is Right' in November 1914, used the story to reinforce his theory of the German character. In Raleigh's mind, the Germans were state-controlled automatons:

No other European army can be marched, in close order, regiment after regiment, up the slope of a glacis, under the fire of machine guns, without flinching, to certain death.<sup>170</sup>

Recruiting officer Coulson Kernahan had the image clearly in his mind as he advised other recruiters not to ask men why they were not at the front.<sup>171</sup>

In the British Army men are not used as "cannon fodder". They are put in the field and in the firing line, not to be shot but to shoot, and to train them to do that takes time.<sup>172</sup>

As that time passed, and more men were sent to the trenches, the experience of war filtered back to the home front. Mrs Purbrook remembered the first returning soldiers, and how she and her friends listened to 'their accounts of the conditions in the trenches with repulsion and dismay'.<sup>173</sup> Mary Coules recorded

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<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, 24 October, 1914.

<sup>169</sup> *KN*, 7 November, 1914.

<sup>170</sup> W. Raleigh, *England and the War: Sundry addresses delivered during the war now first collected by...* (New York, 1918), p. 20.

<sup>171</sup> C. Kernahan, *Experiences of a Recruiting Officer* (London, 1915), p. 72.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>173</sup> Purbrook, IWM, 97/3/1.

several examples of the horror of trench warfare. A letter from C.F. Austin, a friend at the front in November 1914 complained ‘it isn’t the danger that affects one in the trenches, but the beastly hardships of cold and damp’.<sup>174</sup> Austin closed his letter hoping to be home soon, and that he was ‘very sick of war already’.<sup>175</sup> Coules wrote that he was killed in January 1915 by ‘a ball through the head’.<sup>176</sup> Her brother Hugh, home on leave, brought back more stories:

The front trenches are protected by big barricades of dead Germans lightly covered with earth! And whenever a shell bursts, it scatters showers of Germans mixed with clay amongst the first liners!<sup>177</sup>

Vera Brittain’s correspondence with Roland Leighton suggests that many civilians, whilst spared the experience of the trenches, were not unaware of the hardships and dangers. Brittain was fatalistic towards the fate of her friend – soon to be her betrothed – in the ‘region of bloodshed and death’, convinced he was ‘perhaps – nay, probably – never to return’.<sup>178</sup> One letter of Leighton’s, described in Brittain’s diary, described snipers, wounds and rotting corpses:

He writes “You do not mind my telling you these gruesome things, do you? You asked me to tell you everything. It is of such things that my new life is made.”<sup>179</sup>

Brittain’s own training as a nurse brought her closer to the realities of war:

Sister Jones came in & told us all about some very bad cases of wounded from Neuve Chapelle she had seen in a hospital in the south of England. After that the ladies seemed to try & outdo each other in telling stories of war-horrors. [...] They made me feel absolutely cold, & I saw in imagination the shattered bodies of those poor wounded men.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> Coules, IWM, 97/25/1.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>178</sup> Brittain, *War Diary*, pp. 154-155.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 184.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 182.

Recent studies of war have discussed in depth the notion that men revelled in the intensity of the fighting.<sup>181</sup> The anti-war themes of writers such as Sassoon and Graves did not hide the fact that they were competent – in Sassoon's case, almost recklessly good – soldiers who valued the comradeship of the front and felt most comfortable in the proximity of death. There is a range of attitudes to battle in the early reports of the fighting. Some soldiers did not enjoy the fighting, particularly those wounded in the Battle of Mons. Roland Leighton's letters from spring 1915 reveal more a curiosity about the experience of being at the front. Mary Coules' friend wrote of his 'curiously primitive feeling of elation' when he 'bagged' his first German.<sup>182</sup> What we can see from the eyewitness accounts of 1914-15 is that the experience of the trenches was not unknown to the home front. The press did not hold back in its descriptions of war and wounds. Conversation and correspondence ensured that civilians were not as aloof from the fighting as our 'rolling narrative' might suggest. And when the casualty lists began to arrive, few could not realise the gravity of the conflict.

Remembrance and mourning are inseparable from the Great War as we now understand it. By thinking of the war we are 'remembering', and with that the attendant imagery of the Cenotaph, graves and the 'silence of memory'.<sup>183</sup> How did the systems of mourning in the Great War develop? We have seen in the previous chapter the importance of 'display' on the home front. Lists of names are to be found everywhere in the first months of war displaying charity contributions, the identity of Belgian refugees and of course, the 'roll of honour' denoting those had volunteered. One of Andrew Clark's parishioners asked him in June 1915 'to put up again in the Church porch a list of those men of this parish who were serving':

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<sup>181</sup> Ferguson, *The Pity of War*, pp. 339-366; J. Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing: Face to face killing in twentieth century warfare* (New York, 1999).

<sup>182</sup> Coules, 97/25/1.

<sup>183</sup> A. Gregory, *The Silence of Memory: Armistice Day 1919-1946* (Oxford, 1994).



I said, for myself, No! It had been so painful removing the names of those who were killed that I could not force myself to do it again. I gave her free leave, if she liked, to put up such notices for herself.<sup>184</sup>

Those rolls of honour would soon only list those who died in the fighting. The appearance of casualty lists began to dominate the press. As F.A. Robinson noted of the list of those lost in the naval skirmishes in October 1914: '[i]t covers the whole of one side of the paper!'<sup>185</sup> The cold facts of the casualty lists fleshed out the eyewitness accounts, emphasising the scale of the conflicts. Brittain wrote in March 1915:

There was another terrible long list – 40 officer casualties added to the already large number which have resulted from the awful battle, the dearly-bought victory, of Neuve Chapelle last Thursday & Friday week. The fettered Press kept the world in the dark about it, & it is only through the long casualty lists that we are beginning to realise what it must have been.<sup>186</sup>

Two days later Brittain noted that 'the lists seem to grow longer every day; it feels impossible to believe that anyone who goes out there can ever return'.<sup>187</sup>

We have seen in the previous chapter how continued exposure to mounting lists began to reflect the 'banality' of the war. Shock at the first lists faded as familiarity with the news of death increased. The first loss of a relative or acquaintance made a greater impact than the lists of names ever could. F.A. Robinson recorded in his diary 'news of the first tragedy (so far as our circle is concerned)' in November 1914, a young subaltern shot through the spine.<sup>188</sup> In the same month, Lord Roberts was the first famous casualty of the war. His grand funeral echoed the martial glories of a former age, as he was laid to rest in St. Paul's alongside Nelson and Wellington:

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<sup>184</sup> Munson (ed.), *Echoes of the Great War*, p. 66.

<sup>185</sup> Robinson, diary entry for 10 October, 1914, IWM.

<sup>186</sup> Brittain, *War Diary*, p. 162.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 164.

<sup>188</sup> Robinson, diary entry for 3 November, 1914, IWM.

The funeral was a pageant of woe. The sobbing music of the bands, the slow and measured steps of the infantry, and their reversed rifles, seemed to suggest that death not only reduced greatness to dust but also was the end of all things.<sup>189</sup>

The funeral expressed collective grief, and reflected 'unity' in the face of the war. On a local scale the first casualties were greeted with similar display. Andrew Clark planned a memorial service for Alan Tritton, the son of the Lord of the Manor in his Essex village, killed in action on 26 December 1914.<sup>190</sup> It was the Tritton family's wish that the service also remembered two brothers, both privates, from the village who had recently been lost.<sup>191</sup> The death of Private Hardcastle, born in Elland in the West Riding, inspired an impressive display of communal mourning in his home village:

The funeral was most impressive. Thousands of people gathered to pay their last respects, and the approaches to Smithfield Terraca, Elland [*the home of Hardcastle's mother*], were thronged quite half an hour before the cortege was timed to leave.<sup>192</sup>

Buglers and a firing party from the West Riding led the procession, with the coffin – Hardcastle had died from his wounds at a hospital in Birmingham – borne on a gun carriage covered with a Union Jack and wreaths of flowers.<sup>193</sup> As the cortege passed, 'thousands of residents stood bareheaded, many of the women weeping bitterly'.<sup>194</sup> In these events we can detect again the overlapping narratives of meanings from before 1914. Historians such as Julie-Marie Strange have revealed an elaborate culture of death and rituals of mourning among the working classes in the thirty years leading up to the war.<sup>195</sup> Strange argues that

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<sup>189</sup> MacDonagh, *In London During the Great War*, p. 42.

<sup>190</sup> Munson (ed.), *Echoes of the Great War*, p. 41.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>192</sup> *BE*, 2 October, 1914.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>195</sup> J.M. Strange, 'This Mortal Coil: Death and bereavement in working class culture, c. 1880-1914', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Liverpool, 2000.

alongside this was a middle and upper class bemusement and scepticism at the cost and extravagance of these displays.<sup>196</sup> The same debate was raised in the Great War, as the immediacy of death and mourning suddenly became more apparent. Discussions of the denial of luxury have been covered in the previous chapter, representing the purging of pre-war extravagance. MacDonagh reported debates in the press ‘as to whether it would not be well to adopt some indication of loss and grief more distinctive and less costly than the customary mourning apparel’.<sup>197</sup> One lady suggested a ‘that instead of crepe a purple armlet should be worn’ whilst the Duchess of Devonshire argued for a ‘white armlet’.<sup>198</sup> In less lofty social circles this was one pre-war luxury that was wholly retained, certainly in the first months of war:

Women of the working classes attach great importance to funerals and the wearing of mourning. On these they will spend their utmost penny. Not to “show off” would be mean, they think, and disrespectful to the dead. They will even deny themselves food for appearance’s sake. Then the wearing of black by war widows and mothers bereaved of their sons will, by making known their loss to the public, afford some relief to their sorrow.<sup>199</sup>

Did the Great War alter these attitudes? The outpouring of collective grief at the Elland funeral was not replicated as more and more casualties flooded in. Post-war remembrance echoed much more the reserved rituals of mourning – silence, the poppy ‘badge’ – of the press debates than the pageantry of the working class funeral. Was it an issue of cost? Or did the scale and universality of loss in the Great War render pre-war rituals of mourning redundant? Such questions perhaps demand another study. Yet during the period of our study we can see the elements of past and future. Pre-war attitudes were current and debated, and the developing systems of display on the home front – lists of names, badges – anticipated the remembrance customs of the 1920s.

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<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>197</sup> MacDonagh, *In London During the Great War*, p. 32.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*

Death and wounds did not exist only within the sound of guns. Both were everyday realities in pre-war England, and both were reported and discussed with a frankness in 1914-15 that our Great War mythology no longer acknowledges. The imagery of violence and battle on the home front was visible in the press report and the letter from the front. Historians can use the letters of Roland Leighton or the interviews with Crewe soldiers to ascertain certain truths about the war. It is to the questions of rumour and falsehood on the home front that we now turn.

## VI – *'The fog of falsehood' – rumours and spy fever*

We have discussed how the outbreak of war caused a redefinition of who 'belonged', and detailed the development of systems of display to prove inclusion in the war. We have seen how press censorship, combined with a genuine lack of news, created a wave of frustration for those desperate to hear about the conflict. We have also seen how letters, conversation and word-of-mouth spread news and information about trench conditions and bodily injuries. These three elements combined together lead us inexorably to the question of rumours, and the widespread 'spy fever' that gripped the home front, particularly in the years 1914-15. In the inter-war period, the sense of disenchantment over the war contained a powerful element of betrayal by falsehood. Kipling answered the question 'why?' with an admission that the fathers had 'lied'.<sup>200</sup> C.E. Montague recalled the contempt of the army for the atrocity stories that proliferated back in 'blighty'.<sup>201</sup> One Australian sergeant was disappointed at finding the 'great fat boiling yarn' – the rumour of a German 'corpse factory' – to be a fabrication:

"Can't believe a word you read, sir, can you?" he said with some bitterness. Life had failed to yield one of its advertised marvels. The press had lied again. The propagandist myth about Germans had cracked

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<sup>200</sup> J. Silkin (ed.), *The Penguin Book of English Poetry* (London, 1979), p. 136.

<sup>201</sup> C.E. Montague, *Disenchantment* (London, 1922; 1940 edition), p. 114.

up once more. “Can’t believe a word you read” had long been becoming a kind of catch-phrase in the army.<sup>202</sup>

We have discussed Arthur Ponsonby’s views with regard to the press in the war. In *Falsehood in Wartime*, he expanded Montague’s disenchantment to the civilians on the home front:

It must be admitted that many people were conscious and willing dupes. But many more were unconscious and were sincere in their patriotic zeal. Finding now [*the late 1920s*] that elaborately and carefully staged deceptions were practised on them, they feel a resentment which has not only served to open their eyes but may induce them to make their children keep their eyes open when next the bugle sounds.<sup>203</sup>

It will be seen that Ponsonby’s denouncement of ‘carefully staged deceptions’ is an inadequate explanation for the ‘fog of falsehood’ that clouded the war.<sup>204</sup>

Gerard DeGroot has argued that the ‘spy fever’ was unwarranted. The government claimed it arrested twenty-one German spies on 4 August, though few ever made it to trial. Throughout the whole war, only thirty-one agents were ever caught, and ‘[n]ot a single case of sabotage occurred during the war’.<sup>205</sup> Yet the relevance of ‘spy fever’ is not the question of its ‘truth’, but what it can tell us about the outbreak of war.

Anxiety over foreign espionage in Britain had been growing over the fifteen years preceding the outbreak of war. Authors such as William Le Queux and Erskine Childers, prophesising invasion in swashbuckling fiction, sold thousands of copies.<sup>206</sup> The infiltration of spies and the poverty of British counter-espionage were recurring themes. Thus in 1914, fears about German espionage burst out of the spy novels and into the newspapers.

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<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>203</sup> Ponsonby, *Falsehood in Wartime*, p. 26.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>205</sup> G. DeGroot, *Blighty: British Society in the era of the Great War* (London, 1996).

<sup>206</sup> For example, E. Childers, *The Riddle of the Sands* (London 1903); W. Le Queux, *Spies of the Kaiser: Plotting the downfall of England* (London, 1909).

Sabotage was among the main fears. Germany's resources of men and munitions already made them the most testing of opponents. The 'violation' of Belgium left no one in doubt that they were hardy and ferocious soldiers. But espionage added another dimension: was an underhand method of fighting that added cunning to the brutality. And this threat was on the very doorsteps of England. 'Spy fever' brought the war to the street corner in a way that the recruiting drive or the 'flag day' never could.

Spy fears often reflected the characteristics of the locality. On the East Coast, alongside frequent rumours of sea attacks and naval engagements, there were suspicions that German ships were being signalled from the shore. In Grimsby, before the war was formally declared, a soldier was admitted to hospital after falling on his bayonet.<sup>207</sup> The private fell whilst chasing two suspects who were 'loitering' around Waltham wireless station. In the first week of war, a sentry shot a man from Laceby through the thigh when he refused to answer a call of "halt".<sup>208</sup>

It became evident that sentries were as subject to 'spy fever' as the rest of the nation. In Aldershot a local Justice of the Peace was caught watching manoeuvres and arrested.<sup>209</sup> J.E. Carroll, a deaf and nearsighted young man known in the locality, was shot and killed by sentries whilst taking a common local walk along a railway line.<sup>210</sup> Though the verdict of the inquest acquitted the sentry the *Aldershot News* reported that the incident had 'created widespread discussion in the district'.<sup>211</sup> In forty years of sentries in the town, nothing of the sort had happened before, and the paper was quick to report the following week that the sentries in question had been transferred.<sup>212</sup> In Barrow, drunken locals roamed the guarded areas around the shipyards after the public houses closed, were alleged to have taunted sentries, daring them to shoot.<sup>213</sup>

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<sup>207</sup> *GDT*, 31 July, 1914.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*, 7 August, 1914.

<sup>209</sup> *AN*, 14 August, 1914.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*, 21 August, 1914.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*, 28 August, 1914.

<sup>213</sup> *BN*, 22 August, 1914.

‘Spy fever’ inspired distrust in any person not instantly recognisable to a locality. Appearance, accent and actions could all implicate a stranger, and inspire the community to take action. On 4 August the *Grimsby Daily Telegraph* announced ‘SPY CAPTURED’, but revealed that the villain in question was a Russian, Herbert Jan Kewitz, and had been set free.<sup>214</sup> Kewitz, who had worked in the town for a year as clerk, was caught reading a German book whilst resting on a country walk. Kewitz’s capture had ‘created a great deal of excitement in the town’.<sup>215</sup> In Barrow, Frederic Apel, an ‘alleged German spy’ was arrested, ‘after being under observation for some time’.<sup>216</sup> The transcript of his trial described Apel, an unskilled labourer as ‘somewhat dishevelled’ and speaking only ‘broken English’.<sup>217</sup> Apel said to the court:

I do not know for why I have been locked up. I was nothing doing. Plenty people ask me “What do you think about the war”, and I say “Leave me alone”.<sup>218</sup>

The espionage case against Apel suffered an ‘unexpected collapse’ due to lack of proof, but he was still jailed until he could be deported.<sup>219</sup> Barrow was rife with spy fever. Tales of a man on board a new destroyer, and of sabotage at the local oil works were just the start:

This is a typical instance of the spy story which has been in vogue in Barrow during the past week. Prying people have been “shot”, so rumour has it, and aeroplanes have traversed overhead, but the remarkable thing is the entire absence of confirmation of these strange tales.<sup>220</sup>

In the nearby village of Millom a ‘large crowd’ assembled before the boarding house lodging of a Scottish tourist. ‘Owing to his luggage being foreign and his

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<sup>214</sup> *GDT*, 4 August, 1914.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>216</sup> *BN*, 8 August, 1914.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*, 15 August, 1914.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*, 22 August, 1914.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*, 15 August, 1914.

taking photographs', noted the press, 'suspicion had been aroused'.<sup>221</sup> The victim, named Colley, 'alleged he had been hissed and goaded at by some of the bystanders, particularly by the younger element'.<sup>222</sup> The *Peterborough Citizen* reported on the tales of a 'mysterious stranger', who was asking to see the water taps in each house, and putting a 'disc' in the tanks.<sup>223</sup> In Alresford in Essex, two women followed a 'stranger' and sliced the tyres of his bicycle. The alleged spy was revealed to be the coastguard. 'But if they had been the enemy's spies,' the *Essex County Chronicle* commented, the action of the ladies would have been worthy of the V.C.'. <sup>224</sup> Any semblance of 'foreign' was pounced upon. Harry Stern, a merchant who had regularly travelled up to Barrow from Manchester before the war, had caused suspicion and was arrested. He was described as 'Jew, Harry Stern, alias Morganstern'.<sup>225</sup> Andrew Clark's dentist Frank Metcalf related how his brother Jacob had 'a hooked nose, a very black beard, and the general appearance of a villainous German Jew'.<sup>226</sup> Jacob, who since the outbreak of war had requisitioned horses for the government, was visiting a village when an elderly lady 'let fly half-a-brick at him'.<sup>227</sup>

Carl Lody was convicted of espionage and executed in November 1914. As MacDonagh wrote, '[a]t last this spy business has yielded something sensational and dramatic – and real'.<sup>228</sup> Sabotage had not been his aim. As a Lieutenant in the German Naval Reserve who spoke perfect English, he was instructed to relay information on British naval losses.<sup>229</sup> Reporting on the trial, MacDonagh related that Lody found the atmosphere in Britain too suspicious:

His letters to Berlin, via Stockholm, were intercepted in London. In his last letter he said he intended to disappear for a while. "There is a great fear of espionage", he wrote, "and one smells a spy in every stranger."<sup>230</sup>

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<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*, 29 August, 1914.

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>223</sup> *PC*, 19 August, 1914.

<sup>224</sup> *ECC*, 25 September, 1914.

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*, 22 August 1914.

<sup>226</sup> Munson (ed.), *Echoes of the Great War*, p. 39.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>228</sup> MacDonagh, *In London During the Great War*, p. 35.

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 35-36.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*



F.A. Robinson noted Lody's execution in his diary, and opined that 'he no doubt thoroughly deserved his fate, and it is no time to show mercy to such miscreants'.<sup>231</sup>

Rumours did not just centre on espionage. One of the most famous rumours of the war was the fabled passage of thousands of Russian soldiers through Britain, on their way to the Western Front. As Ponsonby sneered, '[n]othing illustrates better the credulity of the public mind in war-time and what favourable soil it becomes for the cultivation of falsehood'.<sup>232</sup> The rumours were ubiquitous. H.A. Gwynne was undecided. The newspaper editor confided to his proprietor that there was 'not a word of truth about the Russian troops, though I wish it were'.<sup>233</sup> Yet two days later he confessed he was 'almost beginning to believe in the story' as he heard it 'corroborated from so many sources'.<sup>234</sup> Andrew Clark noted between 28 August and 3 October six mentions of the Russian troop movement.<sup>235</sup> They were landed in Yorkshire; they were landed in Archangel in Scotland; they were fed in Colchester; eighty thousand of them passed through Oxford; their black beards were visible from the cigars they smoked as they arrived into Bristol; their guns were lost in a wreck of the Scottish coast and they were awaiting fresh artillery.<sup>236</sup> A journalist friend of F.A. Robinson's assured him it was 'quite true'.<sup>237</sup> MacDonagh claimed the 'great news' was 'vouched by people likely to be well informed, but is being kept secret by the authorities':

It is said in confirmation that belated wayfarers at railway stations throughout the country saw long train after long train running through with blinds down, but still allowing glimpses of carriages packed with fierce looking bearded fellows in fur hats.<sup>238</sup>

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<sup>231</sup> Robinson, diary entry for 11 November, 1914.

<sup>232</sup> Ponsonby, *Falsehood in Wartime*, p. 63.

<sup>233</sup> Wilson (ed.), *The Rasp of War*, letter dated 1 September.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*, letter dated 3 September.

<sup>235</sup> Munson (ed.), *Echoes of the Great War*, pp. 9-22.

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>237</sup> Robinson, diary entry for 2 September, 1914.

<sup>238</sup> MacDonagh, *In London During the Great War*, p. 22.

On 15 September, the Press Bureau issued an ‘absolute denial’ of the rumour.<sup>239</sup> Though a few maintained that the statement was a bluff, MacDonagh conceded that ‘it was a case of the wish being father to the thought’.<sup>240</sup>

Perhaps the atrocity rumours stemmed from the same motive. The need to demonise and vilify the figure of German soldier to encourage recruiting led to the embellishment and invention of numerous foul deeds. But as Niall Ferguson, summarising recent findings in the Great War diaries of German soldiers, the rumours – to an extent – were founded on fact:

Although the Entente press wildly exaggerated what went on in Belgium, there is no question that the German army *did* commit ‘atrocities’ there in 1914 [...] The Germans also used civilians as human shields and razed numerous villages to the ground. In one case an eighteen-year-old girl was bayoneted to death. There were also numerous rapes in occupied France.<sup>241</sup>

The press certainly printed the stories, but was not the sole source. Accounts of atrocities seemed to spread as much by word-of-mouth. We have seen above how the early accounts of the wounded troops confirmed some atrocity rumours. F.A. Robinson read of the ‘most appalling barbarities’ in the press but he himself placed most confidence in a report of mutilation that he had heard in conversation.<sup>242</sup> All Andrew Clark’s mentions of atrocities are the result of talks with friends and acquaintances. One friend insisted in October 1914 that ‘there really *is* in the Convent at Bocking a young Belgian girl with both hands hacked off’.<sup>243</sup> Clark’s dentist Franck Metcalf heard direct from the Belgian convalescents he was treating that ‘decapitated bodies of children’ lined the roadside ‘over and over again’ in Belgium.<sup>244</sup> Clark also heard contradictory views. One friend told him the views of her brother, an army Captain who had

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<sup>239</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>241</sup> Ferguson, *The Pity of War*, p. 246, original emphasis.

<sup>242</sup> Robinson, diary entry for 16 September, 1914.

<sup>243</sup> Munson (ed.), *Echoes of the Great War*, p. 26, original emphasis.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

been at the front, which suggested that the Germans' conduct had been 'exaggerated and misrepresented'.<sup>245</sup> The Captain claimed that 'Belgian girls of fifteen or sixteen' armed with revolvers had been attacking the Germans as they marched through villages, providing 'much provocation'.<sup>246</sup>

Atrocity stories were the lifeblood of recruitment rhetoric. We shall see in subsequent chapters how Belgian atrocities were used to encourage volunteers, particularly calling them to envisage 'their women' at the mercy of the brutal Uhlan soldiers. We will hear of how Churchill was quick to define the German naval raiders as 'baby killers' in December 1914.<sup>247</sup> The Bryce Committee of 1915 provided a high profile inquiry into the atrocities, more as an appeal to neutral opinion, particularly that of the United States.<sup>248</sup> In *Falsehood in Wartime* Ponsonby attempts to systematically disprove many of the rumours as proof of the manipulative genius of the propagandists:

[T]here is not a living soul in any country who does not deeply resent having his passions roused, his indignation inflamed, his patriotism exploited, and his highest ideals desecrated by concealment, subterfuge, fraud, falsehood, trickery, and deliberate lying on the part of those in whom he is taught to repose confidence and to whom he is enjoined to pay respect.<sup>249</sup>

Yet Ponsonby's 'top-down' interpretation – an assumption that the press, encouraged by the government, was responsible for the 'fog of falsehood' – is too straightforward, and in many cases simply incorrect. Contemporary diarists were unequivocal in claiming that rumours, from spy scare to atrocity story, were spread outside the newspapers. The press, as we have seen, was repeatedly criticised for the absence of any war news. As MacDonagh, usually sceptical, wrote in mid-August 1914:

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<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>247</sup> See Chapter Six, 'The Realities of War'.

<sup>248</sup> See N. Ferguson, *The Pity of War*, pp. 232-233; also T. Wilson, 'Lord Bryce's investigation into the alleged German atrocities in Belgium, 1914-15', *Journal of Contemporary History* (1979).

<sup>249</sup> Ponsonby, *Falsehood in Wartime*, p. 29.

Who sends these “scares” on the wing? It is a mystery; but however preposterous they may be there are people who believe them and pass them on to others equally credulous. The fact that there is nothing in the newspapers about them does not prove them untrue. “Oh, the newspapers!” these people exclaim. “Don’t we know they are muzzled?”<sup>250</sup>

F.A. Robinson similarly noted that ‘stories are about (though not in the press)’ about the exploits and capture of German spies.<sup>251</sup> Though the veracity of such stories was open to question, Robinson was sure of one fact: ‘These facts are kept out of the papers’.<sup>252</sup> MacDonagh and Robinson’s conclusions date from early August. We have already seen how rumours of price increases had fired the ‘rush on food’ in this period. With the spy and atrocity stories, we can conclude that the press *responded* to the explosion of rumour, rather than dictated it. Many of the rumours reflected the reverse, irrational side of the desire to make the war real, to bring the conflict to the street corner. Sustaining a spy rumour in a locality implicitly ‘included’ the community in the war. The phantom Russians were sighted across the length of the country, such was people’s need to locate them within a recognisable frame of reference. Fears over spies could manifest as anger at perceived outsiders. Some of these were thought to act ‘foreign’, or were simply not immediately recognised. Others were established members of the community: we shall see in a later chapter how collective violence attempted to isolate and exclude these men and women.<sup>253</sup> The rumours of the first months of war, particularly in August 1914, flourished in what we could term as the ‘phoney war’ period before Mons, and in the early days of the ‘Eyewitness’ accounts. As the losses and crises of 1915 began to be known – again through word-of-mouth before appearing the press – harsher truths emerged to overshadow the Belgian crimes. The ‘atrocious’ nature of war

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<sup>250</sup> MacDonagh, *In London During the Great War*, p. 16.

<sup>251</sup> Robinson, diary entry for 19 August, 1914.

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>253</sup> See Chapter Five, ‘The Violence of Belonging’.

did not need to be contrived. It was found in lists of names, the revelations of soldiers and shattered bodies of wounded soldiers.

### **VIII – Conclusion**

May 1915 saw the fall of the Liberal government, the launching of the Ministry of Munitions and the growing acceptance of stalemate on the Western Front. The preceding ten months had been unquestionably historic, a seismic disruption of national life. The economy was transformed, as the army called hundreds of thousands of men from their occupation to the colours. Trades had to adapt to the new demands, or face instant decline. The machinery that powered the vigorous rivalries of Edwardian politics similarly had to find new outlets in charity and recruitment. Newspapers, so vocal and varied in the ‘crisis’ period, were forced to find news where there was none, or none permitted. The troops who survived Mons and the Marne were the last of the professional army. Their experiences, so sought after in the first weeks of war, by late-1915 were becoming the reality for the massed ranks of the volunteer army. The hunger for spies was left ultimately unsatisfied, but the fear and anger against ‘outsiders’ on the home front grew as the casualty lists mounted. With hindsight we can see that the exhausting struggle had barely begun. In 1915, the prospect of such a trial was just being realised. The ‘banality’ of war had arrived.

## Chapter Four

### *'I will be a Man and Enlist' - 'War enthusiasm' and recruitment*

This study does not attempt to be a military history. Its territory is the cobbled street and provincial hall, not the ruins of Ypres or the mud of the Somme. Yet the presence of the soldier in our civilian world was unavoidable. In a community where recognisable involvement in the war effort was mandatory, the soldier in uniform stood above reproach. For a town that sought to proclaim its contribution to others, the number of soldiers it had raised quantified the effort in emphatic terms. The voices of returning soldiers and wounded men gave accounts of the fighting that could not be found in the words of the official 'eye-witness' press reports. The spectacle of soldiers in the streets was thought to inspire men to enlist. Every aspect of the war effort, from knitting socks to making munitions, was aimed at sustaining the soldier.

Where were these soldiers to be found? It is a refrain of First World War histories to contrast the small, yet consummately professional, nature of the British Army in 1914 with the massive conscripted continental ranks. Kitchener's prescient estimate of the war's duration required numbers on an unprecedented scale. That the demands were met remains, as historians cannot fail to recognise, a 'massively impressive response [...] Britain needed men and they responded'.<sup>1</sup> But the mythic account has to be constantly qualified. We imagine a crowd of young men rushing to enlist with little idea of the gravity of the war or the horrors they would face. Yet the peak of recruiting did not follow the declaration of war. Rather the boom occurred between 30 August and 5 September 1915, in direct response to the crisis described in the 'Amiens despatch'.<sup>2</sup> The Germans were nearing Paris, with thousands of the British regular army killed or wounded. Whilst few could anticipate the duration or cost

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<sup>1</sup> G. De Groot, *Blighty: British society in the era of the Great War* (London, 1996), p. 53.

<sup>2</sup> P. Simkins, *Kitchener's Army* (Manchester, 1988), pp. 64-65.

of the war, those who rushed to enlist could not have been wholly expecting the 'picnic' that our myth account might suggest. Neither could this enlistment boom be an argument for the bellicose 'howling for war' that so disturbed David Lloyd George in his inter-war reminiscences - we have discussed in earlier chapters why such anger was consciously rejected in August 1914. In addition, whilst many were undoubtedly cheered by the response, confidence in the ability of the young men to meet the challenge was far from certain. Kitchener's notorious lack of confidence in the Territorial Army suggested that even those already trained in arms were not of sufficient mettle. Here again we remember that August 1914 was not the beginning of these anxieties. Fears over the quality of English manhood both moral and physical had been current since the Boer War, and can be traced further back to the social concern of the 1880s. All these factors informed discussions of the volunteers. Alongside this was the aspirational tone of an emerging narrative of Britain at war. 'War enthusiasm' was directed inwards, towards a nation rising to a challenge and meeting the need. In the same manner that towns could be congratulated on their patriotism and derided for their apathy in the pages of the same newspaper, so the young men of Britain were damned and praised simultaneously over their worthiness for the war effort.

Whichever theme of the opening months of the war is discussed, the power of myth to shape our perceptions must be constantly addressed. In a chapter dealing with recruitment, we must recall how the starting point of this entire thesis is the image of crowds of young men bent on enlisting. Nor is this myth simply a product of a 1990s reading public that sent Faulks and Barker to the summit of the bestseller lists. From the night of 4 August the mythologising began. We have seen how the 'present' of August 1914 is subject to pulls from the past and future. The emerging post-1918 consensus remembered an idyllic golden summer, which shapes our dominant 'rolling narrative' nearly a century later. In contrast, the predominant mythology of commentators in the early months of war was of a fractious, feckless society of trivial squabbles and disputes. This summer of 1914 was a crisis only to be solved by the material and spiritual challenge of the war.

For the non-combatant civilian, the recruitment meeting was a celebration of this challenge. The first section of this chapter examines the recruitment meeting as an event that drew in the whole community in debating and defining the war. The attempt to draw men to the colours was often of secondary importance. Secondly, the chapter discusses how the army represented the principal symbol of the 'unity' that so dominated the rhetoric of politician, preacher and pressman. Finally it traces the way that English manhood was represented - and ultimately remade - in the first months of the war. The role of women in the recruitment process will also be considered.

### I – *'The laying of coal by coal on a fire': Recruitment meetings*

In the days following the outbreak of war, the first hundred thousand volunteers swept into the recruiting offices driven by everything from wild patriotism to desperate poverty. The German advance onto Paris encouraged the main rush, a response to a military crisis. The need for men was perceived as desperate, and it was the motivational powers of the great and the good that were required. It was Asquith who initiated the staging of large recruiting meetings across the nation. As we shall see, his flagship gathering at the Guildhall in London on September 4 set the tone and form for the countless meetings that would follow, a *tour de force* of oratory and pomp. The scene of old men exhorting the young to enlist is a strong image of the popular mythology of the Great War, immortalised in Kipling's bitter self reproach:

If any question why we died,  
Tell them, because our fathers lied.<sup>3</sup>

Arthur Ponsonby's *Falsehood in Wartime* similarly heaped post-war scorn on '[t]he type which came prominently to the front in the broadcasting of falsehood at recruiting meetings.<sup>4</sup> Yet were the 'lies' spoken at recruitment meetings that instrumental in persuading men to enlist? As we have seen, the response to the

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<sup>3</sup> J. Silkin (ed.), *The Penguin Book of First World War Poetry* (London, 1979), p. 136.

<sup>4</sup> A. Ponsonby, *Falsehood in Wartime: Propaganda lies in the First World War* (London, 1928), p.16.



call to arms was tremendous by any measure. But to what extent were the recruitment meetings a factor in this response? This section discusses the role and purpose of the recruitment meeting. Were the meetings aimed at the nascent recruit, or the wider public? Was the purpose of the meetings enlistment, or the act of defining the aims and causes of the war? As we progress we shall see that the assemblies were directed less at the potential soldier, than as a contribution to the inward looking 'war enthusiasm' that so many aspired to in the first months of war. The recruitment meetings became another instance of communities talking to themselves, defining the conflict and the people's role within it. A continual desire, as we have seen throughout this study, was to make the war *real* for a nation separated from the fighting. Certainly the 'meeting' aspect of a recruitment meeting was the most important.

Coulson Kernahan, one of the early travelling recruitment officers, saw the recruitment meeting as an event directed at the community as a whole, rather than just the temporary recruit. Writing in 1915, Kernahan claimed that his meetings had a more universal message. To shake the apathy of the 'public' was the main aim:

In those early days of the war, and I fear the fact holds true also to-day, it was very difficult to make the British public awaken to the fact that this is a war which is *their* business, not merely the business of soldiers [...]<sup>5</sup>

There were many voices in agreement. The London letter of the *Cambridge Daily News* quoted Lord Curzon, who 'disclaims any idea of shouting jingo speeches from public platforms, but thought that useful work might be done in explaining the causes of the war'.<sup>6</sup> Kernahan aimed to create a crowd reminiscent of a religious gathering, '[t]he assembling together of men and women with one object in view, and all with one thought in the mind, is like the laying of coal by coal when making a fire'.<sup>7</sup> The central aims were to emphasise

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<sup>5</sup> C. Kernahan, *The Experiences of a Recruiting Officer: True pictures of splendid patriotism* (London, 1915), p. 28.

<sup>6</sup> *Cambridge Daily News* (hereafter *CDN*), 29 August, 1914.

<sup>7</sup> Kernahan, *The Experiences of a Recruiting Officer*, p. 28.

the import of the war and to establish the justice of the cause. The subject of Belgium so often became the bulwark of any recruitment speech. It established the honour of Britain's involvement, and the horror of Prussian might. Kernahan summed up his rhetoric as an appeal to the audience that if they 'did not make it their business',

...[they] might live to see their own homes burning, their own women and children treated even more brutally and inhumanely than the enemy had treated the women and children of France and Belgium.<sup>8</sup>

This was a staple theme of local and national discussion throughout 1914 and early 1915. And thus the purpose of meeting had been met. Pressure and persuasion on young men to enlist would then follow from a community sure of the gravity - and the integrity - of the task in hand. Thus it was not the influence of the recruiting speaker that drove the man to volunteer, but the more intimate and profound influence of personal acquaintances inspired by the meetings.

Asquith's Guildhall evening took the same pattern. Though not the first of the recruitment meetings, it is a suitable starting point for a discussion of the themes and theatre of these gatherings. The audience itself was lacking in potential recruits. As Michael MacDonagh, present reporting the meeting for *The Times*, noted, '[t]he assembly were mainly elderly City men'.<sup>9</sup> The platform reflected the notables of the city, the Lord Mayor - 'wearing his State robes of silk and gold lace' - politicians and City heavyweights.<sup>10</sup> The speech was a proclamation to the hall, and to the populace, of Britain's stance in the struggle of 'right against might'. The historical trappings of the venue, so resonant to MacDonagh's literary mind, added to the effect:

Guildhall is a place of stirring national memories. The sunlight, stained by the colours of the painted windows, fell on the monuments of Nelson

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> M. MacDonagh, *In London During the Great War* (London, 1935), p. 20.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

and Wellington, and gazing down as it were on the Prime Minister from either side were the statues of Chatham and Pitt [...]<sup>11</sup>

Neither were these echoes of the past lost on Asquith, who recalled Pitt's leadership in the last European struggle. This evocation of a heroic martial past further emphasised the new sense of the nation at war, rejecting the wastrel Edwardian years and embracing the timeless challenge of war. Whilst MacDonagh noted a recruiting sergeant searching for recruits at the close of the meeting, the assembly was clearly about articulating war aims and galvanising public support. The volunteer was simply another rhetorical figure in Asquith's address.

If the countless meetings that followed could hardly match the Guildhall for grandeur and pageantry, the desire for a similar ambience was strong. The meetings usually offered a similar agenda. The justice of the war was affirmed, and the threat to Britain restated. The latter usually pictured the Belgian atrocity stories on local soil. Making the speeches were the first rank of local notables, and the occasional celebrity of national standing. The speakers were often adversaries in politics or faith in peacetime, and their very presence on the same platform was enough to spark pride in the unity engendered by the war.

Bradford, one of the larger northern cities, staged its meeting on Wednesday 16 September. The assembly resembled the standards set by Asquith, with the added spur of local pride. Bradford needed to put on a show. The assumption that the gathering was purely for recruiting purposes was barely acknowledged. This was a local triumph – a community celebrating itself at war. It is significant that the meeting was seen to *follow* the heights of war enthusiasm, to comprise the culmination of this period. A Bradford newspaper begins its account:

Loyal feeling and patriotic spirit have been the dominant sentiments in the minds of the citizens all through the war period, and have found expression in the smart mobilisation of the Territorials at the outset, the

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p.21.

steady recruiting of new soldiers to the number of 200 in a single day, the enrolment of 1,099 men of all classes in the special services battalion, generous subscriptions from all hands to the distress relief funds, and the good graces of “Mrs Bradford” in a multitude of kindly, helpful offices.<sup>12</sup>

This is the emerging narrative of Bradford at war, the coming together of ‘all hands’ in the hour of need. In this context the central aim of the meeting was to see how ‘these splendid endeavours were grandly reviewed in the light of a stimulus to further efforts’.<sup>13</sup> Beginning with a large outdoor parade, the meeting culminated in a Lord Mayor’s feast. The rain ‘fell intermittently in drizzle and in heavy showers’, but there was little to dampen the ardour of the forty thousand that filled the streets.<sup>14</sup> The most emphatic symbol of the town’s contribution, the eleven hundred strong Bradford Service Battalion, paraded through the city accompanied by a band playing ‘lively airs’. The pageantry continued for the elite at the Lord Mayor’s dinner party. Despite claims that ‘the table decorations suggested in restrained taste a scheme of patriotic interest’, there was little of the thrifty crisis spirit about them:

Chief of these was a ship, outlined amid lilies of the valley and maiden hair fern, riding upon a sea of foliage amid which were electric red, white and blue lights. The floral features were in accordance with these colours.<sup>15</sup>

The speeches were as grandiose. The Vicar of Bradford spread the word to the crowds in the Town Hall Square. As a Christian, ‘war was horrible, but there were things even worse than war, and one was for a nation to break its plighted word’. Whilst claiming that he had ‘great respect’ for the ‘real’ Germany, he ‘firmly believed that England never went into a war with a cleaner sheet or a brighter conscience’.

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<sup>12</sup> *Bradford Weekly Telegraph*, 18 September, 1914.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

The Bradford *Telegraph* felt the need to interject at this point that ‘the principal object of the meeting was, of course, to encourage recruiting’. Yet nobody appeared to have told Sir Stanley Buckmaster and Lord Charles Beresford, the most hallowed of the guest speakers. Buckmaster spoke of the woes of Belgium, ‘a country of smouldering ruins, desolated houses, murdered peasants, ruined women’. To prevent Bradford from suffering the same fate, all would be called upon. Nor would the task be easy, when the path to glory would ‘be marked with pain and grief,’ and ‘brave men’s blood be shed like water and women’s tears like mist’. Beresford confessed to his reservations when war was declared, with his own background supporting Home Rule. Yet a higher spirit than base politics had won him over:

The struggle had been between those convictions and his patriotism, loyalty and duty to the country and to the Empire, and his patriotism had won. (Cheers.)<sup>16</sup>

After affirming the ‘just cause’, Beresford made specific reference to the locality:

Yorkshire had always come to the front whenever this country had been in a crisis, and it would be found when the history of this war came to be written that the one thing the Germans hated more than any other was the sight of a British bayonet with a good pair of Yorkshire eyes behind it. (Loud cheers.)<sup>17</sup>

The community gathered round to celebrate. The ‘commercial men of the city’, making their contribution, gave ‘their word of honour’ that young employees would have their situations kept open for them. A scarf from the Boer War, marked with the legend ‘Knitted by Queen Victoria’ was offered as a gift to the ‘Yorkshire mother’ who had the most ‘blood relatives’ in the forces. The national anthem concluded ‘Bradford’s Historic Night’, a community revelling in the demands of war.

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

The new found unity engendered by war was reflected strongly in that the locations of the meetings in Bradford and elsewhere – recognised public spaces – had before the war played host to conflict and division. The town halls and village squares, settings for elections and debates from partisan politics to mundane everyday matters, were now sites of national import. In the village of Great Leighs in Essex, the meeting was held in Lyons Hall barn, home of Lord of the Manor J.H. Tritton. Tritton himself chaired the assembly:

Fellow parishioners of Great and Little Leighs, you have been accustomed to assemble in this barn on various occasions – social, philanthropic, religious but never on a more momentous occasion or of to hear of a more righteous cause.<sup>18</sup>

Those gathered to speak were sometimes old adversaries. In Brighouse, a meeting held on the 31 August at the town hall caused the local press to comment:

Surely it is not often that such a platform is seen. Both the principal political parties were represented, Anglican and Nonconformist ministers joined their voices in the common cause, commerce was well represented, whilst the needs of the army found ready advocates in uniform.<sup>19</sup>

Despite this enthusiasm in unity, the ‘calm’ rational view of the war as demanding task was always emphasised. At a meeting in Nantwich in Cheshire, it was reported that ‘[i]n the temper of the meeting there was not so much the heroic mood as the calm determined manner’.<sup>20</sup> Neither was the message to potential recruits a ‘jingo’ harangue. As Captain Gosset stated, ‘[t]hey did not want men who enlisted to come filled with beer – (hear, hear.) – such men did not know what they were doing, and they could not shoot straight’.<sup>21</sup> As we have

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<sup>18</sup> J. Munson (ed.), *Echoes of the Great War: The Diary of the Reverend Andrew Clark 1914-1919* (Oxford, 1985), p. 13.

<sup>19</sup> *Brighouse Echo* (hereafter *BE*), 4 September, 1914.

<sup>20</sup> *Crewe Chronicle* (hereafter *CC*), 12 September, 1914.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

seen, the spectre of Belgium was transplanted to the local. From the platform in Southend-on-Sea, Austen Chamberlain brought to mind the prospect of marauding Uhlans on the South East Coast:

If we did not defeat the foe in France, Belgium and Germany our own turn would come, our own cities would be blackened ruins. Our greatest monuments destroyed, and our own wives and children driven in front of the invader to deter our soldiers from firing.<sup>22</sup>

Rather than the distant field of battle, 'those sailors and soldiers were fighting as truly for our hearths and homes as if they were fighting in this very county of Essex'.<sup>23</sup> As J.H. Tritton asked Great Leighs, '[t]hink of what it would mean if we were to have our country over-run as Belgium is, and the scenes of horror there, of daily occurrence here'.<sup>24</sup>

Yet despite all the warnings of atrocities, from Bradford and the Guildhall down, the meetings were primarily an affirmation of a 'new' community, empowered and improved by the task in hand. This affirmation depended on the way communities looked back to the period before 4 August, which itself was being mythologised as a debauched era. During recruitment meetings the shedding of petty pre-war rivalries was acted out in the most symbolic way. Rivals were joined in common purpose, in the very locations that in the past had staged their confrontations. There was none of the heckling or violence in the meetings that constituted an accepted convention of Edwardian electoral meetings.<sup>25</sup> The fervour that sprang from revivalist religious meetings was also absent; anything redolent of a perceived Prussian war 'fever' was discouraged. Perhaps the only pre-1914 gathering the recruitment meeting suggested was the ticketed political convention, where the constants were consensus, cohesion and a triumphal statement of intent. The unity was artificially created by the issuing and

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<sup>22</sup> *Essex County Chronicle* (hereafter *ECC*), 18 September, 1914.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Munson (ed.), *Echoes of the Great War*, p. 14.

<sup>25</sup> J. Lawrence, *Speaking for the People: Party, Language and Popular Politics in England, 1867-1914* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 188-93.

policing, and all faithfully reported by the press. But now the audience was so much larger, the need to exclude dissent unnecessary.

But as we have intimated at the start of this section, the relationship between the meetings and their object – the recruitment of volunteers – was less emphatic than the undoubted success of the rallies as occasions. The obvious statement is that the largest cluster of meetings happened towards the end of the recruiting peak. In our ‘set text’ autobiographies, such as those of Sassoon or Graves, the recruitment meeting plays little role as a motive for enlistment. The ‘Amiens dispatch’ perhaps did more for recruitment than Asquith at the Guildhall or Tritton in Lyons Hall Barn. In Bradford the role of the meeting was intended to keep the flame burning, not to provide the spark. By mid-September the most determined and committed must have already volunteered. As autumn became winter, this fact became more obvious, though the appeal of the meetings did not seem to wane. The *Keighley News* lamented in mid-October that ‘[i]n spite of the enthusiasm shown at the public meeting on Thursday night the practical result was most unsatisfactory’.<sup>26</sup> The meeting in Bingley, another Yorkshire town, suffered a similar fate:

From the point of view of public attendance, and from the amount of enthusiasm which was manifested, the recruiting meeting on Monday night could be considered a successful meeting, but, judging by the number of recruits which have since come forward, the good effects of the effort seem to have vanished rather quickly.<sup>27</sup>

Many meetings were evidently more beneficial for the community than the army.

Our recruiting officer Coulson Kernahan more or less reaches the same conclusions. Most of his ‘true pictures of splendid patriotism’ recount face-to-face recruiting stories, outside of the recruiting hall. The attentive crowd was already persuaded, though mainly of the need for *others* to fight. Whilst

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<sup>26</sup> *Keighley News*(hereafter *KN*), 17 October, 1914.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, 31 October, 1914.



appreciative of the communal enthusiasm mustered, Kernahan was all too aware of the way meetings indulged local pride above the matter of recruitment. He preferred his own cadre of speakers to ‘a wearisome outside speaker’.<sup>28</sup> The chairman, he found, ‘speak too often and too great length’.<sup>29</sup> The chair ‘should be selected with the utmost care, not just dumped into his seat because he is a landed proprietor, has “local influence”, is very rich, or in possession of a title’.<sup>30</sup> But Kernahan’s most emphatic advice about recruitment meetings is more important. The hall-based communal set pieces so beloved by the town elites were of no use in attracting the social type that would provide the bulk of recruits: the working man. He laments that ‘[t]he average English labourer is suspicious of halls’, and fears being ‘cornered thus, between four walls, by a special pleader of superior knowledge and superior education, to say nothing of superior social position.’<sup>31</sup> In Kernahan’s opinion, the working man ‘does not like in his working clothes and “muddied” boots to clump to his seat before his betters. In attending a street meeting ‘he is at home and among his friends’, with the freedom to listen or move on. We shall examine the attitudes towards class and recruitment later in this chapter, but it is clear, from the mouth of the expert recruiter, that the hall meeting was not the ideal way to attract volunteers. The recruiting halls were important centres for articulating and promoting the cause to a certain – eager and appreciative – audience. To reach everyone, the war had to be made universally visible. To access the ‘street corner lad’ the war had to be brought to the street corner. It is to this mission we now turn.

## II – ‘It was a wonderful sight’: Outside the Hall

In the preceding chapter, we saw how the war was made visible to the civilian community through pageantry and display. In our examination of ‘war enthusiasm’ we have seen – as with the findings of Becker on France and Verhey on Germany – how the departure of the troops proved the most emotive event.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Kernahan, *The Experiences of a Recruiting Officer*, p. 31.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.

<sup>32</sup> J.J. Becker, *The Great War and the French People* (Paris, 1983; trans. A. Pomerans, 1985) and J. Verhey, *1914* (Cambridge, 2000).

Similarly these emotions could be called into play in attracting recruits. As Kernahan insisted, one had to go to the streets in order to reach everyone. To continually impress the proximity and threat of the conflict to potential volunteers, devices other than the town hall meeting were employed, with varying degrees of success. In some quarters there was a perceived need for this. Douglas Sladen remembered the disturbing quiet that accompanied early volunteers in Richmond in Surrey, and its effect on the demeanour of the crowd:

[*after enlisting*] they marched in stony silence, and amid the chilling indifference engendered of that silence, to the railway station [...] Some of the crowd sniggered, some jeered, none cheered, and the men who had offered their lives to their country might have been justified if they slunk along shamefaced to the sheltering railway station.<sup>33</sup>

Sladen despaired at the ‘depressingly flat’ atmosphere and its effect on recruiting. Who would be inspired to step in and join such a sorry sight? And would the derisive crowd further discourage men to come forward? He agitated for the introduction of marching bands for London regiments throughout 1914-15, enlisting men such as Rudyard Kipling to his cause. Yet the use of music and marching was already a feature of the push for recruitment.

The street parade, as in the large Bradford meeting discussed in the previous section, was a common precursor to the recruitment meeting. The inspiring sight of soldiers, or anything redolent of British martial history or greatness, aimed to encourage recruitment through the spectacle itself. In Southend-on-Sea for example, a meeting in mid-September 1914 was preceded by a march of veterans from the Crimean and Boer wars, and one of Florence Nightingale’s original nurses appeared as a guest of honour.<sup>34</sup> Some recruiting events were more inventive, incorporating more exciting forms of display. In the West Riding the decoration of tramcars with lights and slogans added a new dimension to the

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<sup>33</sup> D. Sladen, *The Story of the Lord Mayor’s Recruiting Bands* (London, 1915), p. 99.

<sup>34</sup> *ECC*, 18 September, 1914.

recruiting procession. As the autumnal evenings darkened, the illuminated cars drew huge crowds. The *Brighouse Echo* describes an early parade:

In the recruiting campaigners' procession there were three cars, a single-decker, towering double-decker and another single-decker. All were studded with fairy lamps, gay with bunting, and flashed appeals for service, such as "Serve Your King" and "Your Country Needs You" and "Now or Never".<sup>35</sup>

The tram car's route took in the outlying areas of the town and was joined by a brass band playing martial tunes in the centre of Brighouse. Hundreds lined the route. In nearby Huddersfield, tramcars were used to advertise and promote meetings, providing a colourful transport for speakers to outlying districts:

A novel and extremely effective method of getting recruits for the 5<sup>th</sup> Reserve Battalion of the Territorials (Foreign Service) is the illuminated tramcar, which made its appearance in the town on Saturday night. Over twelve hundred brilliant electric lights have been employed in a very artistic manner [...] On the sides of the car are the illuminated mottoes – "Your Existence is at stake" and "Your Country Needs You". At each end of the top of the car fly the flags of the five allies.<sup>36</sup>

Local boy Frank Lockwood noted in his diary how thousands turned out to see the nightly visits of the tramcar – 'a most picturesque appearance' - which sported a drum and bugle band playing 'patriotic airs'.<sup>37</sup> The gathered crowds were then treated to recruitment speeches. The illuminated tramcars are an example of the use of pageantry to gain volunteers, but clearly these events encompassed the entire community as visual events. Alongside the sense of national crisis was the pride in a thriving community at war. In Huddersfield the only spectacle to match that of the tramcars were those of the bustling mills, turning out government orders late into the night. The car's route traced the

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<sup>35</sup> *BE*, 25 September, 1914.

<sup>36</sup> *Huddersfield Examiner* (hereafter *HE*), 27 October, 1914.

<sup>37</sup> F T Lockwood, unpublished diary account, IWM 96/52/1.

boundaries of the community, proclaiming the war from village to village. As the months passed, these military displays became even bigger occasions. In May 1915, over six thousand soldiers marched into the centre of Huddersfield from the four corners of the region. Lockwood's vivid description captures the communal excitement of these processions:

The town was decorated with streamers, bunting and hundreds of flags. Nearly all the mills also flew flags from their high towers. From our doorway I saw the Marsden column...pass on its way to St. George's Square. The cavalry with their beautifully groomed horses came first, then the Guns, then the Band which played old time patriotic music & after the Band came the infantry, a long brown line which looked to move as by clockwork, so regular & in step were they. The sound of their boots on the hard granite sets was quite pleasant and musical. It was a wonderful sight, & one that made you realise the horrors of war – to think that these fine strapping fellows would soon be engaged in a life & death struggle with the enemy. Every tram car had a message on either side such as, "Come lads, England expects Huddersfield to do its duty" – "What! Are you here yet? Your King & Country Need You" – "You are of Military Age, Join the Huddersfield R.F.A. Brigade" – "One volunteer is worth ten pressed men" – "Here! You are fit! Join the colours now" & others.<sup>38</sup>

It is worth noting that, for all the impression that the parade made upon the nineteen-year-old Lockwood, he writes as a spectator; it took conscription to bring him to the colours.

Marches and tramcars were visible to all in the community. Slogans appeared everywhere, not just on posters pinned to walls and notice boards. The base of the Nelson monument in was 'covered' with posters, and F A Robinson records slogans pasted on taxi cabs around London, and the Mansion House displaying

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

huge bills calling for more men.<sup>39</sup> Another recruiting drive focussed on a specific area of working class life: football. The continuation of professional football season as the war began became source of class tension. The sight of the largely working class crowds which filled stadiums whilst the battles raged threatened to undermine the sense of unity and the inward 'war enthusiasm'. Whilst more general anxieties over sport in the war have already been dealt with, its relation to recruitment will now be discussed.<sup>40</sup> With the war already assimilating every public space, the Football Association allowed all football grounds to be used for the purposes of encouraging recruitment.<sup>41</sup> Yet the effectiveness of the football ground for gaining recruits was less than expected, as Michael MacDonagh found when he attended a match between Arsenal and Chelsea at Stamford Bridge in December 1914. MacDonagh noted how the sandwich boards, which before the war had sported evangelical quotes, were now disseminating the themes of the recruitment speech:

In these days the posters carries by a line of sandwich-men, walking up and down before the gates of the Chelsea football ground, ask the crowds such questions as: "Are you forgetting that there's a War on?" "Your Country Needs You." "Be ready to Defend your Home and Women from the German Huns".<sup>42</sup>

But the notices appeared to be getting as much attention as "Repent for the time is at hand" received in the days before the war. As Colin Veitch notes, a match at Highbury that produced just one recruit was typical of the returns from football ground recruitment.<sup>43</sup> Crowds were there for the match:

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<sup>39</sup> Macdonagh, *In London During the Great War*, p. 51, and F A Robinson, unpublished diary account, IWM.

<sup>40</sup> See Chapter Three, 'Settling Down to War'.

<sup>41</sup> C. Veitch, 'Play up! Play up! and Win the War!': Football, the Nation and the First World War 1914-15', *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 20 (1985), pp. 363-378.

<sup>42</sup> MacDonagh, *In London During the Great War*, p. 44.

<sup>43</sup> Veitch, 'Play up!' p.373.

What a picture! The rosettes of the supporters of the rival clubs; the rattles and horns; the frenzied cheers, and the shouts of welcome when the teams came running on to the field!<sup>44</sup>

Clearly there was little hope for recruitment pageantry when presented alongside a spectacle that surpassed it for colour and excitement.

Assessing the impact of the methods for encouraging recruitment one must concede that the meetings, the pageantry and the music *followed* the great voluntary surges. The great gatherings and processions reflected the thrill of wartime, and constituted as much a measure of local pride as the lists of volunteers that had come forward. The martial displays were symbols of the newly found unity and purpose of war. Communities looked to the volunteers to echo this unity in their new roles as soldiers, and it is this aspect of the war that we will now examine.

### III – ‘*A triumph of democracy*’ - *Hankey and the First Hundred Thousand*

One of the pillars of the inward looking ‘war enthusiasm’, and the emerging narrative of Britain at war, was that of unity. The nation was putting aside its differences and pulling together. Nowhere, it seemed, was that more symbolised than in the new armies. Enlistment meant the same risk of death, the same uniform and the same rates of pay for those from all sections of society. The first one hundred thousand, the permanent lost youth of our faded 1914 image, consisted of men of all ages and backgrounds. The photographs show the badges of class difference – the flat cap, the straw boater – yet beneath the all the faces smiling and queuing up for immortality. Whilst the rest of the country boasted of how it had shed its Edwardian divisions, did ‘Kitchener’s Boys’ manage the same feat? This section examines the way in which the volunteer army of the first months of war was held as the ideal of the new unity.

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<sup>44</sup> MacDonagh, *In London During the Great War*, p. 45.

Whilst drawing evidence from a range of sources, the discussion centres around the writings of Donald Hankey. A theologian involved in the settlement movement, Hankey was an example of the educated middle or upper class man who joined the army in the first hundred thousand. His idealist articles about army life were published regularly in *The Spectator* until his death on the Somme in 1916. Published posthumously and becoming a best-seller in 1917, *A Student in Arms* took its title from Hankey's *Spectator* pen name, and its stories and essays suggested that the army fostered a mixing of classes that dispelled all the class strife of Edwardian England.<sup>45</sup> For Hankey, the war would succeed where the settlement movement failed. Others will be seen to dispute that belief. C.E. Montague began the war with the same idealism as Hankey. Montague, in his forties by the time of the war, was a Liberal stalwart with steadfast pro-Boer credentials. Yet in the excitement of war he dyed his hair to look young enough to enlist in the ranks, and managed several years of service before being found out and removed from front line service. The difference is that Montague came home from the war. His writings speak of the same opportunity for national regeneration as Hankey, but as a vision denied, an opportunity squandered. 'The early volunteer in his blindness imagined that there was between all Englishmen then that oneness of faith, love and courage.'<sup>46</sup>

Such boundless enthusiasm must have been slightly dampened by the experience of the early recruits. The dash for glory became the dash for the soup ladle, as the huge rush of volunteers swept into an army infrastructure hopelessly unprepared, without sufficient clothing, food or shelter for their new charges. Coulson Kernahan told fellow officers to advise their new recruits:

Don't form your opinion of the service by the first week or two, as things are at present. It's a big rush getting so many men in all at once, and you may have to rough it a bit at first [...]<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> D. Hankey, *A Student In Arms* (London, 1916).

<sup>46</sup> C. E. Montague, *Disenchantment* (London, 1922; 1940 edition), p. 14.

<sup>47</sup> Kernahan, p. 86.

Lack of clothing was a particular grievance for those who sought the status of uniformed heroes. The *Brighouse Examiner* noted in September 1914 that young men were holding back on account of there being no uniforms.<sup>48</sup> Ernest Parker, who joined as a seventeen-year-old in August 1914, remembered how guard duty was keenly looked forward to, as an old soldier's khaki uniform was lent out for the task.<sup>49</sup> Even by December, when Parker was put on standby due to the East Coast bombardments, his battalion 'were still wearing red tunics, blue trousers, khaki caps without badges, and the civilian boots in which they had enlisted'.<sup>50</sup> At an army parade for the King at Aldershot, one division presented 'a ludicrous spectacle so motley was their array':

Some were only half made up, wearing the scarlet jackets, the kilts or the trews of old army uniforms, mingled with articles of civilian attire, all in glaring contrast [...] But most of the recruits were still in the clothes they wore when they enlisted. There was to be seen, accordingly, a diversified and discordant display of straw hats, bowlers and tweed caps. And many were armed with staves!<sup>51</sup>

Nor were the billets quite up to the standard deserving of a young man willing to fight for his country. Soldier's letters from camp, published in the local press, naturally spoke of the cheerful camaraderie of the troops, but hinted at hardships that would hardly encourage the wavering would-be volunteer. Brighouse soldiers reported that water from the camp pump was chalky, and that the sheep-lice ridden troops were spreading rumours of 'horseflesh' rations.<sup>52</sup> Rumours persisted in Cambridge that local territorials were being badly treated, and this was discouraging enlistment.<sup>53</sup> The *Keighley News* felt more men would be willing to commit if the conditions improved:

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<sup>48</sup> *BE*, 18 September, 1914.

<sup>49</sup> E. W. Parker, *Into Battle* (London, 1964), p. 8.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>51</sup> Macdonagh, *In London During the Great War*, p. 31.

<sup>52</sup> *BE*, 25 September, 1914. Nevertheless, according to the press report, they were 'happy as sandboys and playful as kittens'.

<sup>53</sup> *CDN*, 17 October, 1914.



Serving in the army, the letter [*from Keighley lads at Grantham*] points out, is very far from being all pleasure and recreation. The writers complain of some of the hardships they had to put up with immediately after enlistment, and particularly of the delays in serving out their pay, and suggest that a better impression would be created if these things were seen to [...] <sup>54</sup>

F.A. Robinson, in his diary entry for the same day in November, agreed that ‘it was no good getting the men, unless they can be properly fed, housed, equipped and trained, and all these essential things are inadequate for a greatly increased number’. <sup>55</sup> Sleeping outdoors was a common experience. Ernest Parker’s first night of discomfort was enough to shake the ideals of the keenest teenage volunteer:

That night I wrapped myself in a brown blanket and stretched my limbs on the dew-saturated grass my worst fears seemed about to be realized. All around were thousands of recruits, yawning and making jokes into the early hours of the morning. Beneath the bright September stars I tossed restlessly from side to side to ease my projecting hips which pressed into the stones embedded into the grass. <sup>56</sup>

George Coppard, younger even than Parker, was crammed in a tent with over twenty new recruits, forced into a position by the urinal tub, and inevitably ‘got showered’ every time. <sup>57</sup> Tales of the early camps were obviously widespread – one Sussex recruiting poster of 1915 felt the need to make the claim ‘NO MAN UNDER CANVAS’. <sup>58</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> KN, 7 November, 1914.

<sup>55</sup> Robinson, diary entry for 7 November 1914, IWM.

<sup>56</sup> Parker, *Into Battle*, p. 2.

<sup>57</sup> G. Coppard, *With a Machine Gun to Cambrai* (London, 1969), p.2.

<sup>58</sup> K. Grieves, ‘Sussexians and the Western Front: Asserting a county identity during the First World War and its aftermath, 1914-24’ a paper a conference on ‘Regional Identities: Shifting Boundaries and Contested Meanings Conference’, Manchester Metropolitan University, September 2000.

But the major consequence of ‘roughing it’ was the mixing with hitherto avoided sections of society. As the *Crewe Chronicle* remarked of the first volunteers, most of the recruits appeared to ‘come from the class sometimes referred to as “the Bottom Dog”’.<sup>59</sup> In towns across Britain, the prospect of the frightful underclass invading the homes of the well-to-do through billeting was a particular fear. At a council meeting in Cambridge, a Mr Gilbert Stearn told the Mayor ‘it was not troops that Cambridge required, but something to take the place of gentlemen undergraduates’.<sup>60</sup> Billeting troops was all very well, but ‘they could not put troops coming from mining districts in rooms fitted with electric lights and Smyrna carpets’.<sup>61</sup> Stearn was treated with derision in the Cambridge press, but his concerns were echoed in the anxieties over the new armies. Douglas Sladen called the lot of an early volunteer ‘heart-breaking’, with particular reference to a man’s fellow recruits:

The regiment in which he might find himself was a matter of chance; the comrades among whom he found himself might be men with whom he found he had not one idea in common, except the longing to fight for his country; many of them might be men thrown out of work, or men who never had any regular work – the submerged and sinking tenth.<sup>62</sup>

For Philip Gibbs, war correspondent, the new army’s only solace amidst the tents and blankets was comradeship, and even that was ‘not always jolly, if they happened to be a class above their fellows, a moral peg above foul-mouthed slum-dwellers, and men of filthy habits’.<sup>63</sup> Nor was the threat an irrational fear; the camps could be violent places. Ernest Parker, a clerk for a publishers, initially found himself ‘the butt of a group of Eastenders and I had to stand up for myself. Although no boxer, I managed to come off fairly satisfactory when attacked’.<sup>64</sup> Conversely, the enlistment of the rich could cause discontent. In Keighley, manufacturers were ‘seen walking into the ranks as comrades of their

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<sup>59</sup> CC, 12 September, 1914.

<sup>60</sup> *Cambridge Daily News*, 17 December, 1914.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> Sladen, *The Story of the Lord Mayor’s Recruiting Bands*, p. 99.

<sup>63</sup> P. Gibbs, *The Realities of War* (London, 1920), p.59.

<sup>64</sup> Parker, *Into Battle*, p. 4.

own workpeople. On one occasion a millowner rode to headquarters in his motor-car to receive his first day's pay - 1s. 9d.!'<sup>65</sup> MacDonagh reported a how a Peer with 'an income running into tens of thousands', was still claiming the full separation allowance for his wife.<sup>66</sup>

But for men such as Donald Hankey, the throwing together of so many in the hour of need was a tonic for a nation that had lost its way. For a veteran of the settlement movement in Bermondsey in south-east London, the war offered a greater challenge, but the chance of a greater reward:

The war was not the end, but the beginning. We had failed because we had not gone deep enough. We had only touched the surface. To understand the working man one must know him through and through – live, work, drink, sleep with him. And the war gave us a unique opportunity of doing this.<sup>67</sup>

Hankey enlisted on 7 August, and was posted to Elstead in Surrey to train. He was inspired by the diversity of his fellow volunteers, billeted with a Manchester railway fireman, 'a most philosophical person', and Welsh collier, a man of 'broad good humour'.<sup>68</sup> Kitchener's Army was, in Hankey's mind, 'a triumph of democracy, like the Tubes'.<sup>69</sup> His description of the crowd outside Great Scotland Yard is the visual symbol of that triumph:

All classes were there, struggling for the privilege of enlisting in the new citizen Army, conscious of their unity, and determined to give effect to it in the common life of service. It was an extraordinary crowd. Workmen were there in cord breeches and subfusc coats; boys from the East End in the latest fashions from Petticoat Lane; clerks and shop-assistants in sober black; mechanics in blue serge and bowler hats; travellers in the garments

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<sup>65</sup> *Keighley News*, 3 October, 1914.

<sup>66</sup> Macdonagh, *In London During the Great War*, p. 25.

<sup>67</sup> Hankey, *A Student in Arms*, p. 93.

<sup>68</sup> Hankey, letter to his Aunt, 9 December, 1914 in E. Miller (ed.), *Letters of "A Student in Arms"* (London, 1922), p. 322.

<sup>69</sup> Hankey, *A Student in Arms*, p. 21.

of prosperity; and most conspicuously dressed of all, gentlemen in their oldest clothes.<sup>70</sup>

The uneasiness of the middle class in this crowd is palpable in Hankey's article, but by shedding these signifiers of class for the medical inspection, 'they had all been reduced to the common denominator of their sheer humanity'.<sup>71</sup> The coarse conditions of early training sustained this, as after a night under a 'verminous blanket', the well-to-do gentleman 'perceived with something of a shock that he was no longer conspicuous. He was no more than a seedy unit of a seedy crowd'.<sup>72</sup> On gaining a uniform every recruit was able to leave 'the emblems of class distinction on a common rag-heap'.<sup>73</sup> These rites of passage described by Hankey reflected in the purest form the concept of the inward looking 'war enthusiasm' – the transformation of Britain from the decadence and division of the Edwardian years to a newer nation, exchanging self interest for interest in a greater good. Neither was this for the duration of the war only. Hankey looked forward to the gains made during the war being introduced into civilian life after the conflict. The preoccupation of the years leading up to 1914, that of class conflict, would be swept away by the returning citizen army, who had learnt valuable lessons:

Out there [*in the fighting*] if anyone dared to remind you that Jim was only a fireman while you were a bank clerk, you would give him one in the eye to go on with. You have learnt to know a man when you see one, and to value him.<sup>74</sup>

Self-denial for the cause was at the centre of this transformation. The recruit learnt the 'pride of submission' as a cog within the army machine.<sup>75</sup> Even for Hankey's Bermondsey cockney, the 'sacrifice of his personality is for all practical purposes complete'.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p.27.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p.34.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 232.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 85.

As with all elements of the developing narrative of Britain at war, there was plenty of evidence to undermine the ideal. Remnants of Edwardian class distinctions endured, despite the celebration of a new fellowship between the classes. The ‘pals’ regiments, now a byword for embattled fraternity, were initially a response to the unsavoury mix of classes that Hankey relished. The first battalion, formed in Liverpool, seemed a conscious attempt to appeal to the clerk class of the city’s financial sector.<sup>77</sup> Neither were these early Liverpool ‘pals’ universally admired. During their early training they worked on Lord Derby’s country estate, and visits to Liverpool in ‘pal’ regalia were often met with contempt and cries of ‘Derby’s lap dogs!’ from disgruntled city dwellers.<sup>78</sup> Further specialist brigades across Britain, from sportsmen to city financiers, located the volunteer more with men of his own class and caste. At the beginning of the war the army, of course, offered rigid hierarchy and discipline that mirrored the class structure of Edwardian Britain. R.C. Sherriff for example, later the author of the play *Journey’s End*, was refused a commission on account of his lack of a public school background.<sup>79</sup>

Class difference might have been easier forgotten on the battlefield, rather than in the experience of enlistment. Siegfried Sassoon, in his late twenties on the outbreak of war, recalled how only through contact with his men was he ‘beginning to learn that life for the majority of the population, is an unlovely struggle against unfair odds, culminating in a cheap funeral’.<sup>80</sup> Yet Gerard DeGroot warns us against taking the work of Owen, Graves and Sassoon as evidence of empathy between the classes in the Great War. The war poets were ‘uniquely hyper-sensitive, disillusioned, guilt-ridden individuals’, and their view of their ranks was unrepresentative.<sup>81</sup> His inversion of the Ludendorff’s famous ‘lions led by donkeys’ remark is instructive:

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<sup>77</sup> G. Maddocks, *Liverpool Pals: A history of the 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> (Service) Battalions, the King’s (Liverpool Regiment) 1914-1919* (London, 1991).

<sup>78</sup> H. McCartney, ‘Pals Battalions and Regional Identity’, paper presented at the ‘Liverpool and the First World War’ conference, Liverpool, 1998.

<sup>79</sup> G.J. DeGroot, *Blighty: British Society in the Era of the Great War* (London, 1996), p. 165.

<sup>80</sup> S. Sassoon, *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* (London, 1932), p. 58.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 174.

Officers and commanders were very lion-like: dominant, domineering, selfish and preoccupied with the preservation of their world. With no disrespect intended, the working class soldier was a beast of burden, a man caged by a life of drudgery, squalor, powerlessness and social stasis. As such, he made the perfect soldier.<sup>82</sup>

But DeGroot's eloquence hides his own susceptibility to the war myth. The officer class was not wholly composed of the domineering upper class. As recent scholarship has revealed, by 1917 'approximately 40 per cent of British officers were of working-class or at least lower-middle-class origin'.<sup>83</sup> By the last years of the war, a certain dilution of class difference in the army had occurred. Yet the cause was more the cumulative impact of casualties, rather than the simple swap of a straw boater for a khaki cap.

Though a shift in class relations would be one of the war's profound long-term consequences, there was the possibility for change on a higher plane. In the years leading up to the war, church attendance had dwindled; a study showed that in York only twenty eight per cent of the population were regular worshippers.<sup>84</sup> Hankey saw in the war a massive chance for the Anglican Church to bring the Godless ranks of society back to the fold. The average Tommy 'were men who believed absolutely in the Christian virtues of unselfishness, generosity, charity, and humility, without ever connecting them in their minds with Christ'.<sup>85</sup> Several church figures became heroes in the conflict, such as Charles Studdart Kennedy – known as 'Woodbine Willie' – or Theodore Hardy, who won the Victoria Cross.<sup>86</sup> However, the majority of chaplains were unable to connect the Christian values of the men with the doctrines of the church. Hankey's fears were realised. C. E. Montague confirmed this after the war in his critique of army chaplains, claiming that the church had squandered its opening. 'No figure

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<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 173.

<sup>83</sup> G. Sheffield, 'Officer-Man Relations, Discipline and Morale in the British Army of the Great War' in H. Cecil and P. Liddle (ed.) *Facing Armageddon: The First World War Experienced* (London, 1996), pp. 413-424.

<sup>84</sup> *Cit.* Montague, *Disenchantment*, p.85.

<sup>85</sup> Hankey, *A Student in Arms*, p. 98.

<sup>86</sup> See D. Raw, *"Its only me": A life of the Reverend Theodore Bayley Hardy V.C., D.S.O., M.C., 1863-1918, Vicar of Hutton Roof, Westmoreland* (Kendal, 1988). Montague also commends both chaplains as exceptional.

of speech, among all these that I have mixed, can give the measure of the greatness of that opportunity [...] nobody took it'.<sup>87</sup> The church became one more wave in the 'general reservoir of disappointment' closing around the citizen army.<sup>88</sup>

Hankey's writings now can seem the ramblings of a dreamer. Perhaps even just after the Armistice, when Montague was writing *Disenchantment*, they would have seemed nostalgic. Yet he was realistic about life after the war: 'it is more likely that the lessons will be forgotten, and that men will slip back into the old grooves'.<sup>89</sup> In some moments Hankey conceded that the old distances would most likely replace the proximity engendered by the war. As for the returning soldier, '[i]n the bull times of peace his sense of the dramatic would fail him', and the old prejudices would surface.<sup>90</sup> But Hankey's popularity in *The Spectator* and his thousands of book sales suggest his views resonated with his largely middle class audience, and they represent a valuable document of the early years of the war. They reflect an aspirational enthusiasm for the war, of how the demands and sacrifice of the conflict could – and was – transforming Britain. Kitchener's Army lay at the centre of that new solidarity, the mix of boaters and caps replaced by uniform khaki.

#### IV – 'Confident, clean and straight' - Remaking English Manhood

Donald Hankey marked the moment of nakedness in front of fellow volunteers as the first realisation that, behind the class idioms of clothing and speech, all men were the same and faced the crisis as equals. Yet for all the sweep of Hankey's rhetoric, this moment almost certainly *accentuated* the differences between the working class recruit and his middle and upper class comrades. This section examines how recruitment affected the perceptions of the English male, and his suitability as a soldier. If the outbreak of war saw a narrative 'remaking' of a feckless society, so the degenerate manhood of England had to be similarly

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<sup>87</sup> Montague, *Disenchantment*, pp. 96-97.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> Hankey, *A Student in Arms*, p. 35.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77.

reinvented. The influence of women in inspiring and encouraging this reinvention is assessed.

Throughout this study we have observed how the mythologies of the Great War pull from both the past and the present, that the narratives and debates of 1914 looked back to the Edwardian and even Victorian eras for their themes and values. The mythic account of recruitment echoes this dichotomy. Our prevailing image is of a 'lost generation' of brilliant men – the flower of Britain's youth. Heroes such as Rupert Brooke, Wilfred Owen or Vera Brittain's Roland were symbols of a manhood that age could not wither. Even as early as 1920, Philip Gibbs' recollection of the early volunteers anticipates our hazy vision:

The flower of our youth went out to France and Flanders, to Egypt, Palestine, Gallipoli, Mesopotamia, and Salonika, and it was a fine flower, of gallant boyhood, clean, for the most part, eager, not brutal, except by intensive training, simple in minds and hearts, chivalrous in instinct, without hatred, adventurous, laughter-loving and dutiful.<sup>91</sup>

Whilst the ghosts of lost friends haunted the postwar dreams of veterans like Sassoon and Graves, the legacy of the 'glorious dead' – beatified by the growing cult of remembrance - grew heavy on the generation that followed. In Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited*, only by volunteering to combat the general strike do the young men of the twenties hope to match the standard set a decade before:

'You and I', he said, 'were too young to fight in the war. Other chaps fought, millions of them dead. Not us. We'll show the dead chaps we can fight, too.'

'That's why I'm here,' I said. 'Come from overseas, rallying to old country in hour of need.'<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Gibbs, *The Realities of War*, p. 432.

<sup>92</sup> E. Waugh, *Brideshead Revisited* (London, 1945), p. 198.



Though primarily a comic sequence, the farcical episode that follows only emphasises the impotence of those who sought to impose themselves on a society that mourned and idealised a lost dead.

Yet the concept of a hallowed ‘lost generation’ so prevalent in the inter-war period would have been unrecognisable to the England of the first months of the war. The unease of the intelligentsia at the shortcomings of the growing population had been rising in the three decades leading up to 1914, and the war presented the ultimate test. The sector of society defined as the working class was the largest and most discussed group. Beyond the increasingly powerful political influence of trade unions and political representation – an alarming factor in itself – stood ranks of the poverty stricken and malnourished. From the 1880s social sensationalism such as Andrew Mearns’s ‘Bitter Cry of Outcast London’ had uncovered a world of amorality, starvation and disease.<sup>93</sup> On the very doorstep of the wealth that powered the empire sat a degenerate and sickly populace. From the pariahs of George Gissing’s ‘Nether World’ to the hysterical mobs of J.A. Hobson’s jingoes, fear and loathing of the new mass society dominated the political and literary landscape of the age.<sup>94</sup> The Boer War provided something of a dress rehearsal for a larger European War, and many felt that Britain had been found wanting. The rejection of thousands of volunteers through lack of physical fitness resulted in the Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee on Physical Deterioration in 1904.<sup>95</sup> Whilst the report encouragingly rejected many of the genetic theories on racial degeneration, it still provided a picture of society which saw many of its members in want of adequate diet or housing. A myriad of boys’ organisations sought to prepare and improve the physique of a new generation of British soldiers, and the National Service league lobbied for conscripted army training. Yet in August 1914 confidence in the nation’s youth to form an adequate armed force was hardly strong.

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<sup>93</sup> A. Mearns, ‘The Bitter Cry of Outcast London’ in P. Keating (ed.) *Into Unknown England 1866-1913: Selections from the social explorers* (Glasgow, 1976).

<sup>94</sup> G. Gissing, *The Nether World* (London, 1889). J.A. Hobson, *The Psychology of Jingoism* (London, 1901).

<sup>95</sup> *Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee on Physical Deterioration* (HMSO, 1904), Cd., 2175, I..

Neither were the working classes the only doubted section of society. The growth of the London suburbs, and their expanding middle classes, stirred similar apprehensions of degeneration. When Kitchener dismissed the Territorials as a 'Town Clerk's army', his disgust echoed an established train of intellectual thought.<sup>96</sup> John Carey's literary criticism places the emerging lower middle-class clerk at the centre of elite misgivings.<sup>97</sup> Here, the drab philistinism of the emerging suburbs marked a both a cerebral and physical deterioration. In E.M. Forster's *Howards End*, the clerk Leonard Bast has 'a spine that might have been straight' and a 'chest that might have been broadened'.<sup>98</sup> Symbolic of the whole of clerkdom, his physical frailty is matched by his flawed attempts at embracing high culture.<sup>99</sup> Forster is one among many who were unsympathetic to the rising clerk class, born of the Elementary Education Act and weaned on mass culture in the years that followed.<sup>100</sup> Hobson's critique of 'Jingo' society attacked the braying of the music hall and smudged print of the new national newspapers.

These anxieties were reflected in 1914, and survived into the immediate postwar period. A *Cambridge Daily News* editorial suggested that the local youth 'amble aimlessly on – flanneled fools and muddled oafs – unconscious or careless of our peril'.<sup>101</sup> One recruiting speaker began his speech by revealing that:

There are some people who think that the people of this country are degenerate. They tell you that the young men now prefer to spend their time looking at pictures in a cinema or watching local football matches which others play, leading a life of as much ease and comfort as possible.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> *Cit.* Simkins, *Kitchener's Army*, p. 41.

<sup>97</sup> J. Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice among the Literary Intelligentsia, 1880-1939* (London, 1992).

<sup>98</sup> E.M. Forster, *cit.* Carey, p. 63.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 18-19.

<sup>100</sup> Weaned metaphorically and literally. Carey reveals how Forster makes reference to Bast living on 'tinned food' – quintessential 'mass' culture.

<sup>101</sup> *CDN*, 29 August, 1914.

<sup>102</sup> *PC*, 2 September, 1914.

Some were optimistic. Michael MacDonagh claimed the city clerks possessed 'two of the best qualities of soldiers, physical fitness and mental alertness, as was seen in their lithesome frames and bright faces'.<sup>103</sup> Kernahan pinned his hopes on the 'big, brawny young manhood of the countryside'.<sup>104</sup> Philip Gibbs remembers people's faith in the 'old yeoman ancestry', and the strength of the agricultural worker.<sup>105</sup> Donald Hankey knew there was 'no doubt about the public schoolboy', and how he would cope with war. But contemporary opinion was less sure of, for example, the London working class. Hankey summed up such anxieties:

For in every respect where the traditions of the public school make for soldierly qualities, the traditions of the East End seem to be against their formation [...] He was, in fact, the last person in the world that we could imagine going out with set teeth to hurt and slay the enemies of his country.<sup>106</sup>

Philip Gibbs remembered a class for whom '[a]ny allusion to "The Empire" left them stone-cold, unless they confused it with the Empire music-hall, when their hearts warmed to the name'.<sup>107</sup> Whilst doubters over character and courage waited to be proved right or wrong, the physical inferiority of the British soldier became apparent in the the Dardanelles campaign. In contrast to their impressive Canadian and Australian allies, the 'flower of youth' was a painfully inadequate bloom. Australian journalist Charles Bean wrote in 1915:

they [*the ANZACs*] do not have the slightest confidence in Kitchener's army – nor have our officers – nor have I. The truth is that after 100 years of breeding in slums, the British race is not the same, as in the days of Waterloo. It is breeding one fine class at the expense of all the rest. The only hope is that those puny narrow-chested little men may, if they come out to Australia or NZ or Canada, within two generations breed

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<sup>103</sup> Macdonagh, *In London During the Great War*, p. 23.

<sup>104</sup> Kernahan, *The Experiences of the Recruiting Officer*, p. 18.

<sup>105</sup> Gibbs, *The Realities of War*, p. 64.

<sup>106</sup> Hankey, *A Student in Arms*, pp. 82-83.

<sup>107</sup> Gibbs, *The Realities of War*, p. 64.

men again. England herself, unless she does something heroic, cannot hope to...<sup>108</sup>

Gibbs conceded after the war that the ANZACs 'had all the British quality of courage and the benefit of a harder physique gained by outdoor life and unweakened ancestry'.<sup>109</sup> If the British myth is of a golden lost generation, the Antipodean myth narrative by contrast derides the quality of Kitchener's Army. One New Zealand veteran recalled the first meeting with the new recruits at Gallipoli: '[l]ittle kids, they seemed, about sixteen. And they were blubbering, crying their eyes out. Terrified.'<sup>110</sup> Another confirmed that the soldiers 'were just boys, most of them, seventeen or eighteen years old and physically most unimpressive compared to the Australians or New Zealanders on the peninsula'.<sup>111</sup> These volunteers were from Lancashire, synonymous with the slums and factories of the industrial revolution. Though the fear and loathing of the intelligentsia sprang from London, the degeneration was clearly a national malady.

How would a nation, empowered by its positive response to the conflict, convert the skeletal child of the slums or the diminutive son of the suburbs into the sturdy defender of the Empire? Physical shortcomings were certainly evident. Kernahan advised his recruitment officers to look out for 'curvature of the spine [...] narrow chested [...] is he ruptured? [...] subject to fits? [...] varicose veins?', a sorry catalogue of failings for a generation of youth. At a London recruiting station in mid-September 1914, MacDonagh claimed that '[f]he required standard of fitness was too high' for dismayed volunteers.<sup>112</sup> One disgruntled volunteer from Peterborough, turned away on account of bad teeth was reported to have asked: 'Are we supposed to eat the Germans?'<sup>113</sup> Despite Kernahan's vigilance, the medical examinations were not always so scrupulous. Robert Roberts recalled the conditions in a Salford slum:

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<sup>108</sup> *Cit.* G. Moorhouse, *Hell's Foundations: A town, its myths and Gallipoli* (London, 1992), p.9.

<sup>109</sup> Gibbs, *The Realities of War*, p. 432.

<sup>110</sup> G. Moorhouse, *Hell's Foundations: A town, its myths and Gallipoli* (London, 1992), p.9.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>112</sup> MacDonagh, *In London During the Great War*, p. 25.

<sup>113</sup> *PC*, 19 August, 1914.

The local drill hall was taking recruits at the rate of eighty a day. Officials stressed that many more had applied, only to be found unfit, though the standards fixed by some medical officers do not seem to have been too rigorous. The clerk to our own board of guardians reported, for instance, that 'two phthisics' had left the workhouse hospital without permission and gone to join up, and that one of them, an 'absolute consumptive, has been accepted and sent off to Winchester barracks'.<sup>114</sup>

The government's solution to stemming the early rush of recruits was simply to raise the minimum height required of volunteers from five foot three inches to five foot six, a mark of how easy it was to bar a large proportion of the population. We have seen how the nation recast itself as firm, unified combatant country. In the first months of war we can see the same process occurring with the volunteer army. Joining the army was seen as the seal of manhood, and the making of the nation's youth. The sickly offspring of a decadent mother country was transformed.

For many of the working class, army life, accounting for all the hardships of the early volunteer, was an improvement in living standards. The diet *was* better, despite the 'horseflesh' rumours, the physical exercise beneficial, and the change almost instant. One happy recruit, Private Pike, wrote to his parents from camp that 'it is a fine life and I am getting the rosebud tint'.<sup>115</sup> In Salford the returning volunteers surprised everyone:

In the first few months of hostilities many local recruits returning on their first 'furlough' (leave was a later term) astonished us all. Pounds – sometimes stones – sometimes heavier, taller, confident, clean and straight, they were hardly recognisable as the men who went away.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> R. Roberts, *The Classic Slum: Salford life in the first quarter of the century* (Manchester, 1971), p. 189.

<sup>115</sup> *BE*, 25 October, 1914.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

For all the speeches at recruitment meetings about Belgium and honour, here was a more persuasive advert. As Roberts observed, '[o]thers, seeing the transformation, hurried off to the barracks'.<sup>117</sup> The quality of food on offer in the army was a familiar subject. The *Essex County Chronicle* published a letter from Sergeant Kelly Maxwell at the front, another culinary endorsement of army life: 'We fry our breakfast bacon, boil water, and make tea on coke fires. Have heaps of food; bread, butter, jam, beef, cheese and chocolate in plenty'.<sup>118</sup> MacDonagh, visiting a rural army camp, was pleased to note that the food was 'abundant and varied – fresh meat, bacon, bread, tea, jam'. On the downside, the cooking was 'exorable'.<sup>119</sup> For those who had not been in want of food before enlistment, the diet helped them become leaner and better suited to training. Hankey noted how '[s]ome of us began by being stout, and have lost weight; others were seedy and are filling out [...] some miss their claret, others their fish-and-chips'.<sup>120</sup>

The transformation of the volunteers into troops was a source of pride and, perhaps due to pre-war scepticism, surprise. E. W. Parker, observing a march by the Highland division, asked: '[w]ere these the freemen of yesterday, peaceful citizens who a few months ago strolled to work?'<sup>121</sup> As one correspondent reported of the recruits in Chelmsford as early as mid-September, '[o]ne only has to look at a company on the march and see what wonders a brief training can do towards improvement of the general stamina and bearing of men'.<sup>122</sup> A month later at the same camp, the King himself was 'struck by the physique and soldierly bearing of the men, who, being ready to go anywhere and endure anything for King and Country, looked also physically fit to do so'.<sup>123</sup> The change was noted as being most prominent in the men's bodies. Kernahan knew when he had an old soldier in the recruiting office, 'marking the square shoulders, erect carriage, and the firm set of the mouth under the moustache'.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>118</sup> *Essex County Chronicle*, 19 December, 1914.

<sup>119</sup> MacDonagh, *In London During the Great War*, p. 30.

<sup>120</sup> Hankey, *A Student in Arms*, pp. 21-22.

<sup>121</sup> Parker, *Into Battle*, p. 13.

<sup>122</sup> *ECC*, 18 September, 1914.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 16 October, 1914.

<sup>124</sup> Kernahan, *The Experiences of a Recruiting Officer*, p. 20.

Another veteran, with his 'shoulders squared, and with his feet at the correct angle of forty-five degrees, stood respectfully to attention'.<sup>125</sup> The old soldier was the opposite to the slouching figure of those yet to enlist. A letter to the *Brighouse Echo* complained of the 'young fellows' who 'lounge about the corners of our streets, and other unsuitable places'.<sup>126</sup> Kernahan's description of Hastings' shirkers is of an embodiment of the street loafer, the degenerate Edwardian youth:

It is the centre of the town, the chosen cronies' corner gossip-shop and meeting-place of all the so-called-out-of-works, the don't-want-to-works and other gentry of that ilk who swam in most seaside towns. A round dozen hands in pocket, and pipes in mouth, were industriously and ably supporting the walls of a popular public-house from falling down.<sup>127</sup>

Fittingly the shirker is redeemed by the act of volunteering. When the forms had been signed, Kernahan's old soldier would 'ceremoniously salute; if a raw recruit he will perhaps lift, touch or tug clumsily at his cap, and pass out'.<sup>128</sup> Hankey wrote in late 1915 – in an article entitled 'The Making of a Man' – of the difference between new recruits and those volunteers who had seen action:

The recruit is not set. He stands loosely. He is never still. His expression is always changing. His eyes are restless [...] Now he is frankly bored, his head and shoulders droop forward, he stands on one leg, his eyes are fixed on the ground.<sup>129</sup>

The contrast with the veterans is striking:

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<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.

<sup>126</sup> *BE*, 11 September, 1914.

<sup>127</sup> Kernahan, *The Experiences of a Recruiting Officer*, p. 75.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86.

<sup>129</sup> Hankey, *A Student in Arms*, p. 227.

He is thicker. His limbs are quiet and under control. He stands solidly motionless and upright. His mouth is firmly shut. His eyes are steady, and their expression unvarying.<sup>130</sup>

As the months passed the change of the new recruits was conspicuous. 'Khaki has obliterated the differences in class which are so apparent in civilian attire', MacDonagh wrote on New Year's Eve 1914. '[W]hen you meet them in the streets you cannot tell from their appearances whether they have come from country houses and parsonages, or from labourer's cottages and artisan dwellings'.<sup>131</sup> Andrew Clark noted the change in one of his parishioners in April 1915. Before enlisting he was just a boy, but '[i]n khaki he is a fine, tall, wiry soldier-like fellow'.<sup>132</sup>

Masculinity can only be defined in relation to femininity. While the degenerate men and boys of England were reinvented as masculine heroes, the first months of war saw women as portrayed helpless objects to be defended. The suffragette, a politicised woman in the sphere of men, had been cast away with the rest of the perceived Edwardian decadence. We have seen in the previous chapters and above how the German occupation of Belgium was articulated using violent sexual imagery, such as 'rape' or 'violation'. Atrocity rumours fed the public stories of brutal sexual mutilation. Recruitment speakers asked if the prospective volunteers would like to see their womenfolk suffer the same fate. Posters challenged masculine pride: 'Daddy, what did YOU do?'; 'the girl who cuts you dead'; 'If he won't fight for his country, would he fight for YOU?' January 1915 saw the slogan: 'The Greatest Resolution for the New Year: I will be a MAN and Enlist To-day'.<sup>133</sup> The *Cambridge Daily News* put this appeal to the 'maidens': 'Let them refuse to look at any youth who declines to don khaki'.<sup>134</sup> In Kernahan's story of recruiting amongst the hop-pickers, the women's appeal equate volunteering as the sole qualification of manhood:

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<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 228.

<sup>131</sup> MacDonagh, *In London During the Great War*, p. 47.

<sup>132</sup> Munson (ed.), *Echoes of the Great War*, p. 55.

<sup>133</sup> *Wiltshire News* (hereafter *WN*), 1 January, 1915; Also noted in MacDonagh, p. 52.

<sup>134</sup> *CDN*, 29 August, 1914.



Show us you're a man, Harry. We shall all be proud of you if you do, for we don't want, any of us – do we, girls? – to have a man who isn't a man, and won't do his duty for his country today.<sup>135</sup>

Gibbs listed 'the taunt of a girl' among the many motives for enlistment, but there was concern that women were discouraging sons and sweethearts from enlistment. At a recruitment meeting in Swindon, a General Jefferies chided the audience:

I was told in one place...that the women were holding the young men back (laughter). I do hope it is not the case in Swindon with the women. We do look to the women to regard this matter from a national standpoint and tell their man to go and fight and show them that they will value them more when they go back.<sup>136</sup>

Of course these are representations of female views and behaviour manipulated to draw men to the colours. To what extent did women pressure men to enlistment? Vera Brittain's father was against his eighteen-year-old son Edward enlisting in 1914 yet it was Vera and her mother who persuaded him to 'see it from the point of view of honour' and back down.<sup>137</sup> Cecil Chesterton, brother of G.K., was promised marriage by his fiancé Ada Jones only if he enlisted.<sup>138</sup> The most famous example of female pressure is the white feather 'campaign' from the early months of the war. Beginning in Folkestone in early 1914, the white feather remains at the centre of our mythic narrative of the war. The perpetrators, usually upper-class women, are the ultimate symbol of uninformed bellicosity. Most stories surviving of white feathers centre around mistaken identity and ridicule for the woman. A Major from the Royal Irish Rifles, accosted in civilian dress, followed his accuser to the recruiting officer before revealing his identity.<sup>139</sup> Doris Lessing recounts her father's bitterness over

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<sup>135</sup> Kernahan, *The Experiences of a Recruiting Officer*, p. 24.

<sup>136</sup> *WN*, 28 August, 1914.

<sup>137</sup> A. Bishop (ed.), *Vera Brittain War Diary 1913-1917: Chronicle of Youth* (London, 1981), p. 102.

<sup>138</sup> J. Pearce, *Wisdom and Innocence: A life of G K Chesterton* (London, 1996), pp. 231-232.

Cecil later died from illness in France in the days following the Armistice.

<sup>139</sup> L. MacDonald (ed.), *1914-18: Voices and images of the Great War* (London, 1988), p. 53.

‘stupid women who gave white feathers to men in civvies, half dead from the Trenches, and then spat at them’.<sup>140</sup> Other stories recount the awarding of white feathers to amputees.<sup>141</sup> Nicoletta Gullace’s study reveals how women used ‘the language of sexual shame to coerce young men into military service’.<sup>142</sup> Whilst the words and imagery of recruitment used women to taunt men into volunteering, its literal performance by the white feather brigades merited almost universal contempt. One editorial stated:

The white feather business must be stopped. There is no justification for it, and the women who resort to it should be found something better to do. Let them join their sisters in needle work for the brave soldiers who are fighting for them.<sup>143</sup>

Kernahan and MacDonagh were both scathing about the white feather, and F.A. Robinson noted in November 1914:

The fact is that there is a sort of persecution going on, and young men (who may have excellent grounds for not enlisting) are subject to reproaches and insults. Girls go about offering young men white feathers, and they write letters to their young men friends urging them to enlist and wanting to know the reasons for not doing so. These are the women, or some of them, who up till quite recently claimed equality with man, and who by their outrageous conduct and their immodest fashions in dress have done their utmost to bring themselves into contempt.<sup>144</sup>

Gullace discusses how the white feather was part of much larger issue of women’s influence on men volunteering. Stories of the exchange of white feathers for proof of enlistment, underpinned with the possibilities of sexual

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<sup>140</sup> D. Lessing, *Under My Skin: Volume one of my autobiography, to 1949* (London, 1994), p. 36.

<sup>141</sup> N.F. Gullace, ‘White Feathers and Wounded Men: Female patriotism and the memory of the Great War’, *Journal of British Studies*, 36 (April 1997), pp. 178-206.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 180.

<sup>143</sup> *ECC*, 18 September, 1914.

<sup>144</sup> F A Robinson, unpublished diary account, 10 November 1914, IWM. See Kernahan, *The Experiences of a Recruiting Officer*, p. 70, and MacDonagh, *In London During the Great War*, p. 80.

gratification, reflect the uneasy balance between the official appeal for women to encourage men, and moral alarm when the process was enacted.<sup>145</sup> For regardless of white feathers shaming men to enlist, the everyday female attention lavished on those in uniform was more than enough to fire a man with patriotic ardour. MacDonagh recalled how every wounded man appeared to have ‘an attendant group of girl worshippers’.<sup>146</sup> Mary Coules described the popularity of the new army in Worthing:

All the men were very quiet and gentlemanly & well spoken in the town; Kitchener’s Army is better than its reputation. The night before they left Worthing the front was crowded with touching couples (very literally Touching) who had finally to be told it was past eleven by the military police!<sup>147</sup>

Upon their departure, it seemed the whole of ‘Worthing turned sadly homeward, bereft of its dear Tommies - & in the evening went to church, to repent of its sins!’<sup>148</sup> The phenomenon of “Khaki Fever”, and the attempts to police young women and their contact with soldiers showed that female interaction with soldiers persisted beyond any official sanction.<sup>149</sup>

As a tool of the propagandist, the image of women was used to challenge and inspire the masculine pride of the potential volunteer. But the reality was more complex. Women themselves offered a range of responses. Some pressured their loved ones to volunteer, following the advice of the recruiting speakers. Others kept their husbands or sons from enlisting, undermining the call to arms. Respectable society feared for the moral health of young women in their new proximity to soldiers. If the men of England were inspired by their heroic new masculinity, so were many women.

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<sup>145</sup> Gullace, ‘White Feathers and Wounded Men’, pp. 188-198.

<sup>146</sup> MacDonagh, *In London During the Great War*, p. 55.

<sup>147</sup> Mary Coules, unpublished notebooks IWM 97/25/1.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>149</sup> A. Woollacott, ‘Khaki Fever and Its Control: Gender, class, age and sexual morality on the British homefront in the First World War’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 29 (1994).

## V - Conclusion

Our faded photos of crowds of men queuing to enlist in 1914 represent a phenomenal response to a nation's call. The diversity of motives and inspiration – whether they enlisted in the first week, or during the great September boom – behind so many thousands will render any all-encompassing explanation glib and inadequate. What we can determine is that the recruitment meetings fed off the pride and excitement that the rush to the colours inspired. The meetings constituted a civic declaration of war aims, a celebration of the community at war. Pageantry and display sated the desire for all things martial: the soldier in khaki, the display of strength. We have defined the 'war enthusiasm' of 1914 as an inward looking praise, the sound of a nation congratulating itself. The recruitment meetings led the applause.

The citizen army symbolised the nation at war. Commentators looked back to the days before August 1914, and saw a society torn asunder by disputes over class, gender and nationalism. In a hurry to reject an increasingly mythologised pre-war malaise, many celebrated the volunteer army, young men of all classes banding together for higher purpose. The country marching out from Lloyd George's 'sheltered valley' saw itself in the figure of the young volunteer. Slumped, stunted and frivolous became 'confident, clean and straight'. The youth of England had answered the call. Their 'womenfolk' provided a polyphony of responses, from disapproval, through encouragement to outright humiliation, further emphasising the transformation of English manhood. The eventual success – and the terrible cost of that success – which they achieved on the battlefield ensured a retrospective glory. The queues of men are no longer the slum children or stunted clerks, but the great lost generation of England.

## Chapter Five

### *The Violence of Belonging – The anti-German riots of 1914-15*

One of the major themes of this study is the strain that the transition from peace to war places on communities. We have seen how the press and political elites attempt to construct the ideal of a calm and unified community, and identified some of the everyday tensions that threatened this. A major factor in the calls for calm was the fear of social unrest. Would the outbreak of war provide the catalyst for the sort of workers' uprising that the Second International threatened? The almost immediate acquiescence of the trade unions and mainstream left allayed the fears - and quashed the hopes - of those few, on both sides, who harboured such fantasies. But the social unrest most feared would be a product of the economic situation. Incidents of violence and rising tensions surrounding the 'Rush on Food', compounded with those thrown out of work by the outbreak of war all suggested a disenfranchised majority unlikely to stay calm or unified. Yet violence or unrest directed at the community, at the elites or towards the war effort did not emerge on a large scale in 1914-15. Violence against German residents in Britain however, was common in this period, and deserves attention.

This chapter examines the anti-German riots that occurred in England between August 1914 and May 1915. What did they represent? What can they tell us about the response to war and the role of collective violence in Britain? Left-wing contemporaries, most notably Sylvia Pankhurst, viewed the riots as a symptom of the economic dislocation. Pankhurst claimed that the attacks on bakers and butchers reflected more the motives behind the riots than the fact that the victims were *German* bakers and butchers.<sup>1</sup> Much important work on the anti-German riots has been done by Panikos Panayi, whose analysis remains the most detailed historical consideration of the unrest.<sup>2</sup> Revising the economic

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<sup>1</sup> Pankhurst, *The Home Front* (London, 1932).

<sup>2</sup> P. Panayi, *Enemy in our Midst: Germans in Britain During the First World War* (London, 1991); *Racial Violence in Britain 1840-1950* (Leicester, 1993).

interpretation of the riot, Panayi places the anti-German riots within the context of racial violence in Britain. Placed in a sequence that includes the race riots of 1919 and the late forties, the riots are further evidence against 'the traditional views of British History which argue that British society shows a great degree of tolerance towards its immigrant minorities'.<sup>3</sup>

Though this conclusion is undoubtedly valuable, this chapter attempts to extend this debate to consider the violence at a different level. It will be seen that the anti-German riots are set more in the context of an existing repertoire of violence against those who *don't belong*. Racial identity is a major factor, but the same forms of violence occurred in much older traditions in British popular culture. E.P. Thompson's work on eighteenth-century food riots suggested that the unrest represented more than just economic distress.<sup>4</sup> Instead, the violence represented a communal denouncement of the trader in question, for breaching the perceived 'moral economy' between seller and consumer. Crucially, the rioters endorsed their violence with the sense that they were *right*. Thompson claims that '[i]t is possible to detect in almost every eighteenth-century crowd action some legitimizing notion. By the notion of legitimation I mean that the men and women in the crowd were informed by the belief that they were defending traditional rights or customs'.<sup>5</sup> I do not suggest that the 'traditional rights' of Thompson's eighteenth-century crowd survived unchanged until 1914. But the years between provide numerous instances of how crowd violence performed similar roles in changing historical situations. In British popular culture there are examples of crowd action on a very intimate communal level. Rituals such as 'Charivaris' and 'Stang-riding' saw mobs gather to identify those who did not conform to the moral norms of the community, such as the cuckolded husband or unfaithful wife.<sup>6</sup> Much closer to our period, during the South African War, mobs

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<sup>3</sup> Panayi, *Enemy in our Midst*, pp. 223-4.

<sup>4</sup> E.P. Thompson, 'The moral economy of the English crowd in the eighteenth century', *Past and Present*, 50 (1971), pp. 76-136.

<sup>5</sup> E.P. Thompson, 'The moral economy of the English crowd in the eighteenth century', *Past and Present*, 50 (1971), p. 77.

<sup>6</sup> R.D. Storch, 'Please to remember the fifth of November': Conflict, solidarity and public order in Southern England, 1815-1900' in Storch (ed.), *Popular Culture and Custom in Nineteenth-Century England* (London, 1982), pp. 71-99.

gathered to smash the houses of those in the locality who opposed the conflict.<sup>7</sup> The 'rush on food' engendered many questions about 'fair tradesmen' and often saw frustration spill into violence. Suzanne Desan's work, building upon the research of E.P. Thompson into crowd violence and community, provides some important observations that can be applied to the anti-German riots. Instead of merely affirming the community through violence against an 'other', such incidents represented a much more complex process at work. As Desan states, 'one could also argue that violence actually fundamentally transformed the [...] community and entirely redefined it'.<sup>8</sup> What is occurring in 1914-15 is a contest for community. So far in this study we have heard the voices of the press, and of local elites. Violence provided a means for those on the margins – distressed workers, male and female youth - to shape who *belonged*, who was *included*. That the proponents used brickbats instead of the printed word to arbitrate this in no way threatened its legitimacy in their eyes. The tensions between these two voices permeate this chapter.

The riots also tell us a great deal about the anxieties about violence, and how this affected the 'war enthusiasm' of stern resolve and inclusion. How did the authorities deal with the violence, and what did this convey about attitudes to the war? How did these attitudes change between August 1914 and May 1915? The chapter begins with an analysis of a riot that occurred in the first days of the war in Peterborough. It then looks at the disturbances in Keighley (at the close of August), Crewe and Essex (October). The chapter closes with a discussion of the 'Lusitania riots' of May 1915.

### I – 'The first feverish flush' – Peterborough 7-8 August 1914

The *Peterborough Citizen* had never seen anything like it. The paper claimed that the scenes in the first week of war were 'unparalleled in the history of Peterborough'.<sup>9</sup> In the first days of war, a local pork butcher, Frederick Frank,

<sup>7</sup> R. Price, *An Imperial War and the British Working Class: Working class attitudes and reactions to the Boer War 1899-1902* (London, 1972) and K. Good, 'Perfect Saturnalia': Mafeking Night in Huddersfield and Lancaster', unpublished M.A. dissertation, Lancaster University, 1998.

<sup>8</sup> S. Desan, 'Crowds, Community and Ritual in the Work of E.P. Thompson and Natalie Davis' in L. Hunt (ed.), *The New Cultural History* (Berkeley, 1989), pp. 47-71.

<sup>9</sup> *Peterborough Citizen* (hereafter *PC*), 12 August, 1914. All following Peterborough quotes from the same issue.

was 'alleged to have used provocative language with reference to the present unhappy state of war between England and Germany'. Frank, born in Germany, had dwelt in Peterborough for over thirty years. In the new atmosphere of war, his status in the community was suddenly transformed, and feelings began to run high in the light of Frank's nationality and his rumoured comments. As the *Citizen* remarked, there had been 'much wild talk in the City during the day, principally among the irresponsible youths, of "giving him a warm time tonight"'. From seven in the evening a crowd assembled outside Frank's shop, where 'people contented themselves with alternately singing patriotic songs and with booing and cheering'. One member of the crowd then hurled a stone at the windows of the shop. As the paper reported it this 'was greeted with a cheer and this emboldened many who had only waited for someone to make a start, to throw bricks and other missiles and it was not long before all the glass was shattered'. The police were unable to control the crowd and by ten o'clock the yeomanry had been called. As the Mayor read the Riot Act, the soldiers began to force back the crowd 'using their rifles cross-wise'. The crowd began to resist, and 'several fistic encounters' forced the soldiers to begin using their rifle butts. A dozen mounted yeomanry then appeared, but '[e]ven then the crowd continued to press on the horses and the troopers charged several times sending the people scattering in all directions'. The crowd began to melt away around midnight, but 'a section of the rougher element not finding matters quite lively enough in Westgate [*the location of Frank's shop*]' proceeded to Frank's private residence. All the glass at the front of the house was then smashed. A charge of mounted troops resulted in more ugly clashes, and the crowd eventually dispersed. The *Citizen* suggested that the words of Councillor Crawley, who reminded the crowd of the good reputation of Frank, played a major role in calming the crowd. Some of the mob also sought another pork butcher's shop in the city, owned by a Mr. Metz, and more windows were smashed. However, the 'timely appearance of Mr. John Sturton and other citizens prevented the looting of the shop, and Mr. Metz lost only a few loin chops'.

If the events of Friday night were viewed as unprecedented, they nevertheless 'paled into insignificance' compared to Saturday's unrest. As the *Citizen* remarked, 'the scenes which were witnessed in Westgate and Long Causeway



will be long remembered'. Throughout the city, the smashing of Frank's shop was the 'one topic of conversation' on Saturday morning. Frank visited the Mayor and 'claimed protection as a naturalised citizen', which was promised. Thirty new special constables were sworn in. The shopkeeper then advertised the auction of his stock for half past two that afternoon. The *Citizen* reported that '[t]he wisdom of this was very much questioned', and predictably a 'huge cosmopolitan crowd' appeared at the shop. Those who purchased goods from the shop - bar a few women customers - were stripped of their items, and '[v]ery soon articles of diet such as sausages, haslet and pork pies were being hurled indiscriminately at the besieged premises'. Some youths climbed the nearby 'electric standard' and hung strings of sausages from the wires. As the police attempted to intervene, one constable 'received the full force of a sausage in his eye, and another is alleged to have been laid out by a flitch of bacon!'

The *Citizen's* jovial tone regarding the looting of Frank's goods was replaced by a more concerned tenor in the account of the rioting on Saturday evening. A Mr. Guest, a publican at the 'Salmon and Compasses' inn, was rumoured to have made remarks supporting Frank. A crowd gathered around the pub, and for most of the evening, 'beyond the usual horseplay, nothing of a riotous nature occurred'. But by half past eleven, the crowd had grown to an estimated three thousand people, and the first window was smashed to loud cheers. As the crowd sought to rush the doors of the pub, a hose-pipe was turned upon them, causing a 'mad stampede'. However, this retaliatory measure 'only seemed to fan the passion of the rowdies', who returned to fight the special constables and slice the hose. The police attempted to make arrests, to 'the sound of great booing'. A great struggle ensued for those captured, and the police caused particular outrage by arresting a young stone thrower. The *Citizen* claimed that the police had 'behaved splendidly', and the crowd began to disperse around half past one on Sunday morning. There were no serious injuries.

Who were the rioters? The folly of identifying trouble-makers from crowds of several thousand was a common problem in the policing of all the anti-German riots. For Friday night's unrest, only two were apprehended: Alfred Haycock, for assaulting a policeman, and Walter Neave for riotous behaviour. Both were

identified as labourers. Similarly, the eleven arrested for Saturday's disturbances numbered five labourers, a moulder, a stonemason, a fitter, a groom, a painter and a 'motor driver'. The charges included drunk and disorderly, assaulting a policeman and criminal damage. Richard Price, examining the 'Pro-Boer' violence of the South African War, concluded that the major protagonist of these disturbances were the 'young clerk, with his middle class pretensions and status'.<sup>10</sup> Whilst the value of this analysis is itself open to speculation, it is clear that those at the centre of the Peterborough riots were manual workers.<sup>11</sup> Alongside those actually arrested, it seems that there were a great many of the youth of both sexes. Young boys seem to have been the main perpetrators of the theft following Frank's auction. The *Citizen* remarked of the crowd on Saturday evening that 'a great proportion, it is sad to relate, being women and young girls'.

The question of inclusion, one of our major themes of the response to war, was determined by violence. Mr. Frank did not now belong; a fact illustrated by the smashing of windows and the destruction of goods of his shop and house. It does not appear that Frank, particularly during the auction of his goods when he was most vulnerable, was in any real physical danger. The gathering of crowds outside his shop and the 'Salmon and Compasses' were redolent of both South African War violence and the 'charivari' violence. The principal purpose was the *identification* of the excluded party. The jeers of the crowd, the threat of violence left the new 'outsider' in no doubt of their predicament. Following Susanne Desan's argument, we can observe the way in which those on the margins - manual workers, women, youth – sought to transform the boundaries of the community. Three respectable members of society were excluded by the violence.

The influence of this attempt to reinvent the boundaries of community is debatable. Both during and after the Peterborough riots, there were plenty of voices acting and speaking out against the violence. Both Mr. Frank and Mr.

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<sup>10</sup> Price, *An Imperial War and the British Working Classes*, p. 241.

<sup>11</sup> For a critique of Price see K. Good, 'Perfect Saturnalia: Mafeking Night in Huddersfield and Lancaster'.

Guest made claims for their inclusion by placing adverts in the press. Frank offered £100 to ‘anyone who can prove that he or his son have ever said a word against His Majesty the King or the British Nation. He has been a Domiciled British Resident 31½ years and attests his loyalty to the crown’. Guest offered £10 for any information on who spread the ‘BASE RUMOUR’ about his German sympathies. He stated that he was ‘an old serviceman [...] liable to serve’.<sup>12</sup> The ‘citizens’ that prevented the looting of Metz’s shop and the thirty special constables who volunteered on Saturday suggested that there were a few in the town who resisted the rioters. The police and uniformed yeomanry did not flinch from fighting the rioters. The Mayor reading the riot act affirmed their authority. The *Peterborough Citizen* felt that the magistrates ‘dealt leniently’ with the rioters:

Two only were sent to prison and fines were inflicted in three other cases, of the rest seventeen were bound over and four volunteered to enlist, one being discharged. It is hardly conceivable, but the fact remains that one of the men defended himself by stating that he had been actuated in what he did by “good instincts – patriotic instincts!”<sup>13</sup>

The *Citizen* endorsed the magistrate’s view that it is ‘never part of English Patriotism for a crowd to attack one defenceless man’.

The view that the violence was not befitting of the war effort echoes the general identification of ‘war fever’ as juvenile and distant from the real issues of the war. When the magistrate stressed that the riots were not patriotic, he also declared that ‘neither is it in consonance with manliness’.<sup>14</sup> Those up on charges for the riots were often acquitted on the condition that they enlisted. The exchange of the childish window smashing for the manly demands of real soldiering was evidently penance enough. The *Citizen* was similarly able to use this exchange as a symbol of the city’s redemption from the humiliation of the riots to their mature acceptance of the task in hand:

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<sup>12</sup> PC, 12 August, 1914.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 19 August, 1914.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

The first feverish flush of the war at Peterborough is passing, the consternation and almost nerve numbing horror of it all has been succeeded by subdued serenity united with grim determination to face the future with relentless resolve [...] In the meantime the daily routine is once more returning to its ordinary courses [...] holiday makers are taking their vacations, and Peterborough is almost itself again.<sup>15</sup>

The *Citizen's* comforting narrative of events is one of aspiration rather than certainty. Peterborough remained subject to 'spy fever', and the spectre of violence returned during the Luisitainia riots, as we shall see below.

## II - The 'Renewal' of violence – Keighley August 29-September 1

The Keighley riots were, in Panayi's words, 'the most serious disturbance of August 1914'.<sup>16</sup> He blames 'the effects of the first excitement of war, a provocative act by those who came under attack, and, in the case of Keighley, the local economic situation'.<sup>17</sup> Panayi's study surveys anti-German riots across the 1914-18 period, and thus, understandably, his approach is wanting in some of the detail around the Keighley riot. This section provides a detailed examination of the Keighley rioting from its occurrence through to its trial and sentencing. From this case study we can identify many of the important questions surrounding the motives, nature and effects of the anti-German riots.

The *Keighley News* reported that:

A huge crowd assembled in the neighbourhood and when the men came out women of the Parkwood district gave the signal by loud shrieks and imprecations for a chorus of groans and hisses. In a few seconds Low

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Panayi, *Enemy in our Midst*, p. 224.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 225.

Mill Lane, Station Bridge, Parkwood Bottom, and the streets in the vicinity were packed with thousands of people.<sup>18</sup>

This passage could conceivably find a place within any narrative of the anti-German riots of August 1914. Yet this report derives from an incident a month before the outbreak of war, a product of a bitter labour dispute in the engineering trade in the town. The strike, which had begun on May 1, had reached one of its most violent episodes in early July. What began as a violent struggle with the police protecting non-union workers ended with a large crowd gathering outside a factory owner's house. After three hours of boos and cheers, members of the crowd went on to smash the windows of a nearby cinema, in which the factory owner had an interest.

The underlying themes of this example of unrest help to locate the later wartime riots in the context of continuity beyond Pankhurst's starving proletarians or Panayi's racial analysis. The violence of the crowd was directed against outsiders, the strikebreakers who were flaunting the solidarity of the many who were holding out. Neither were the rioters exclusively the directly aggrieved; the riotous crowd was thought to have been 'by no means composed wholly of men directly concerned in the dispute'.<sup>19</sup> It is probable that this view constituted the press's attempt to undermine the legitimacy of the riot. Yet it may also suggest that the violence represented an exciting, inclusive event which could involve others in the attempt to define who belonged. The action against the factory owners was concerned with demarcation and appearance. Smashed windows were a clear mark of the rioting public's opinion, visible to all. The press reaction would find itself echoed in later issues. Commenting on the violent scenes, the *Keighley News* argued that

The presence of closely-packed crowds of sight seers, who are simply out to see what is going on, renders it all the more easy for the ill-disposed to commit wanton acts of destruction, which are harmful to the object of the

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<sup>18</sup> *Keighley News* (hereafter *KN*), 11 July, 1914.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

really serious-minded strikers as they are damaging to the good name of the town.<sup>20</sup>

The apparent allure of rioting as a social activity engendered by the massing of people in the streets, and the difficulty in dealing with the 'ill-disposed' rioters within this crowd, anticipated the problems of policing the anti-German riots.<sup>21</sup> The impact of the unrest on the town's reputation was clearly felt. In wartime, when the stakes of communal pride were invariably raised, the disgrace was to be much increased.

Thus the rioting in Keighley during August 1914 was part of a continuing saga of animosity. The anti-German aspect of the riots featured as a catalyst, rather than as the central theme of the violence. The riot was sparked by an incident at the premises of Carl Andrassy, a pork butcher. On the evening of Saturday 29 August, Thomas Kelly, a labourer, entered the shop and asked for some "hazlett". Kelly then asked Mrs. Andrassy if the hazlett was Irish or German. A scuffle ensued, and Mr. Andrassy ejected Kelly from the shop.<sup>22</sup> Two hours later as the pubs began to shut, Kelly and an entourage of friends returned to the shop and began to smash the windows. They were observed by a rapidly growing crowd, who 'shouted and jeered as every stone was thrown'. The arrival of the police and fire brigade 'was the signal for an outbreak of menacing shouts and jeers by the more irresponsible members of the crowd'. Bottles and stones were thrown at the police, with particular attention being given to the mounted police. Only the arrival of the local Catholic priest, who appealed to the crowd for calm, halted the unrest.

Sunday saw rioting on a much larger scale. As the *Keighley News* reported:

In anticipation of a renewal of Saturday's night's scenes a large crowd assembled in High Street, opposite Mr. Andrassy's shop, between 8 and

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> The stone throwers were fined £1 and costs – *KN*, 1 August, 1914.

<sup>22</sup> The account of the argument in Andrassy's shop is drawn from the evidence given by Andrassy's assistant Harry Eccles, given in *KN*, 12 September, 1914. The subsequent narrative of the riots draws from *KN*, 5 September, 1914.

10 o'clock on Sunday night. Almost on the stroke of 10 about 200 boys and men, their pockets filled with stones, set off from the front of Mr. Andrassy's shop. They went in processional order to Church Green, and forthwith began to bombard the house-windows of a pork butcher named Hoffman. Within the space of two minutes every window had been demolished, cheers being raised as the stones were thrown across the road.

Then the crowd turned its attention elsewhere, and smashed the windows of the shops of Mr. Stein and Mr. Schulz. At Schulz's shop the family managed to escape out the back, as the mob looted the shop. The crowd hurled the meat and bread at the police, who were struggling to contain the riot. Numbering now in thousands, the mob returned to Andrassy's shop and began to loot the premises, where a minor fire was started. At this point the riot seemed to change both in motive, and in the choice of victim. The crowd began to make its way to 'Hillbrook', the residence of Sir Prince Smith. Smith was an employer involved in the engineers' strike, and much of the rancour of the rioters in early July was directed at him. Yet when the crowd had reached the gates, 'a large force of police swept down upon them with drawn batons and sent them helter skelter down Girl Street and Spring Garden Lane'. Though the police succeeded in driving the crowd from 'Hillbrook', the riot was not yet over. The windows of the police station were smashed, and another pork butcher's shop - this one owned by the son of a police constable, rather than an identifiable German - suffered the same fate as the others. The police began to make arrests after midnight, as the crowd began to melt away, and by one o'clock the streets were calm. More clashes with the police occurred on Monday, when a large crowd gathered in the centre of the town, apparently seeking revenge for the previous night's baton charge. More arrests were made, and with the help of reinforcements from nearby Bradford, order was restored.

The *Keighley News* claimed that '[n]o scenes equalling those during the three hours from 10 pm to 1 am had been witnessed at Keighley within living memory, and it is hoped that the town may never pass through a similar experience again'. What can this riot tell us about violence, and its place within the context of

events and attitudes of August 1914? It is important to look at the following groups and their actions during the riots: the rioters, the victims, the press and the authorities.

The rioters at Peterborough claimed patriotism as a justification for their actions. Conversely, the press and authorities sought to distance their idea of 'English patriotism' from the violent crowds. The Keighley riot is slightly more complex than this. Not only do the victims of the riot fail to fit wholly to the German pork butcher stereotype, but many of the perpetrators of the unrest do not claim to be the 'English patriots' that ran abroad in Peterborough. The *Keighley News* tells us that the crowd surrounding Andrassy's shop on the Saturday 'apparently consisted of large numbers of the Irish population of the town'. Father Russel, the local Catholic priest, brought the Saturday unrest to a close with his pleas for calm. Should this necessarily be a surprising feature of the riot? It appeared that in Keighley the local Irish population had followed the lead of parliament, and shed the domestic animosities of the summer. In mid-August the *News* noted that the Irish in Keighley were:

pleased to see that Orange and Green had united in Ireland in the resolve to defend that country and empire. English Unionists would no longer be able to say that Irishmen were disloyal and would welcome a foreign power to Ireland in times of war.<sup>23</sup>

The crowds that surrounded the shop sang 'God save Ireland', but also 'God save the King' and 'Rule Britannia'. The defence at the trial 'urged that this disturbance was a case of perverted patriotism' – a common argument – '*plus Irish temperament*'.<sup>24</sup> The riots were clearly identified on one level with an ethnic group. Simultaneously, by virtue of the attack on the house of Sir Prince Smith, they became identified with the striking engineers. The testimony of defendants during the trials was dotted with references to the industrial dispute. The wife of James Marren, a moulder, related in court how her husband had only

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<sup>23</sup> *KN*, 15 August, 1914.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 12 September, 1914, my emphasis.



worked two days in nine weeks.<sup>25</sup> John Smith revealed how he ‘had been out of work for sixteen weeks on account of the strike, and when in good employment he could earn about £3 per week’.<sup>26</sup>

The Irish and the striking engineers formed an important group within the crowd, but there were other people involved in the riot. As the *Keighley News* demonstrated in its coverage of the July riots, the appeal of violence grew beyond the core group of malcontents. Women played a significant role in harassing the non-union men in the July disturbances, and they were equally to the fore of the August trouble. The *News* noted that girls were throwing stones on the Sunday night, and ‘a number of women’ were struck during the baton charge outside ‘Hillbrook’.<sup>27</sup> Women who were identified by the police were punished more for their roles as provocateurs than as rioters. Jessie Vynner, a textile worker, aged twenty-two with no convictions, was charged with being drunk and disorderly on both Sunday and Monday. The officer who apprehended her opined that

she was a very excitable character. She was one of a number of women who had been inciting the crowd during the last few nights to commit violence. He himself had seen her, and her conduct was disgraceful.<sup>28</sup>

She was fined ten shillings and costs, or the option of twenty-eight days. Two other women, a millhand and a laundress were fined for inciting the crowd to throw stones.<sup>29</sup>

Evidence at the trial estimated the crowd at its largest to number around five thousand. Eight ‘ringleaders’, and a few other men, were identified and arrested. Their words, reported in the press, can give us an insight into the mindset of the rioters. Of course, their account is defence testimony, and is perhaps more useful in demonstrating how the violence could best be rationalised and validated in the

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 5 September, 1914.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 12 September, 1914.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 5 September, 1914.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 12 September, 1914.

context of the first months of war. Thus the greater share of the discussion is focused upon the crimes against German residents and the police. The 'Hillbrook' incident is barely mentioned – the defendants seem on much safer ground discussing their 'anti-German' perspective on the riot.

Herbert Towers, a weaver, was convicted of looting bacon. 'I saw others taking it', he said, 'and was tempted to take some as well'. The bench considered him to be 'nothing more than one of the silly mob'.<sup>30</sup> Men like Thomas Kelly, whose altercation with Andrassy initiated the riot, received the serious interrogations. At the Keighley borough police court it was revealed that Kelly, on being told by police to take out a summons against Andrassy replied, 'I want no summons. I am going to have my own back'. He suggested men like Andrassy should be treated 'as they treat them in Germany'.<sup>31</sup> At the sentencing at Wakefield in mid-October, Kelly had a more detailed story prepared. A rumour that Mrs. Andrassy had been 'triumphing over the casualty list at Mons' appeared for the first time. Kelly's quarrel with Mrs. Andrassy was over the price of the hazlett, to which she allegedly said 'You English don't know what you want'. Mr. Andrassy then assaulted Kelly, threatening to make 'sausage meat' out of him.<sup>32</sup> The scale of the provocation had been honed by the defence into the caustic comments of the Andrassys, who were not present at the trial. The defence claimed that Andrassy's assault was the cause of the whole trouble. Outraged by Kelly's treatment, his friends set about gaining revenge. Constable Frankland heard Patrick Jennings claiming that 'We will kill the --- Germans before morning and put his shop into ruins'. Owen McGuinness was heard to shout 'Let's do the --- Germans the same as they are doing to the Belgians'.

The other statements of the defendants all suggest the belief they had in the validity of their conduct. One example of this is the conciliatory manner in which the rioters addressed the police. As Andrassy's shop was about to be smashed, Frankland was told by Robert Wall, 'You had better have a walk down the street while the boys have a go and kill the --- German'. Inspector Harrison,

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 5 September, 1914.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 12 September, 1914.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 24 October, 1914.

on ordering the crowd to stop the fracas, had been told by John Smith to 'take a walk as far as the Vic and leave us to it, and we will soon pull the --- out of the mess'. Harrison also claimed that one of the rioters had encouraged the crowd not to throw stones at the police, as they were 'British subjects'.<sup>33</sup> There appeared to be certain boundaries to the nature of the violence, though the police's refusal to acquiesce placed them at the mercy of the crowd.

The violence of Sunday night was a lot more serious, but possessed the same conceit of legitimacy. At the head of the rioters was the forty-year old labourer William Darcy, who was shouting to passers by 'Who will join Darcy's army?' It was Darcy who led the crowd to Stein's shop and allegedly cried 'Now lads, let's go to Prince Smith's'. The parody of military action was infectious. 'Join Darcy's army and we will put all the windows of the town in' shouted Patrick Jennings, as the crowd marched along.<sup>34</sup> One man up in court for the riot claimed: 'I am not a member of Darcy's Army'.<sup>35</sup> Even the press and authorities used the phrase, as an example of the organised nature of the riot, making the identification of ringleaders easier. Darcy found himself gradually promoted as accounts of the riot developed. The *News* claims the call was 'who will join Sergeant-Major Darcy's army?' and the prosecution at Wakefield talks of 'Major Darcy'.<sup>36</sup> The same overtures to the police were made. Darcy claimed that 'I never touched the police, I tried to protect them'.<sup>37</sup> A man called Mullaney called out to one policeman as the looting began, 'How will a side of bacon do, Inspector? You can have some for your breakfast in the morning'.<sup>38</sup> But the police were far from accommodating towards Darcy's army. The force of police resistance became a motive for the violence itself. James Marren, involved in the disturbances on the Monday, 'declared that he would break the police-station windows for what had been done to a man named Darcy the night before'.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 12 September, 1914.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 5 and 12 September, 1914.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 19 September, 1914.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 5 September and 24 October, 1914.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 12 September, 1914.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 10 October, 1914.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 5 September, 1914.

Abraham Mills' reason for his presence at the riot was that 'I heard that the "bobbies" were knocking kids down, and I was seeking my kid'.<sup>40</sup>

Looting was a feature of the riot, but seemed more a consequence than a motivation. None of the ringleaders seemed concerned to defend themselves from it, or were charged for it. As has been suggested, reference to the 'Hillbrook' incident was confined only to the crimes committed, rather than in the context of the engineers' strike. A witness claimed that Darcy made a speech about Prince Smith, though no details were given, and Owen McGuinness was adamant that the rioters were not going 'until we smash this --- house up'.<sup>41</sup> The actions of the rioters were couched in the existing methods of popular violence. They attacked the shops of Andrassy, Stein and Schulz in the same manner they harried the strikebreakers. The violence against Smith was a culmination of the unrest that had begun in July. The police stood in the way of the justice of the crowd, and they – and their buildings – suffered the same fate. As in the Peterborough riot, the protagonists, for all their threats, seemed content in damaging property alone. The only injuries were those caused to the rioters and the police, not the victims of the riot. Those who didn't now belong had had their territory marked. It is to them we now turn.

During the Peterborough riot, the injured parties used the press as a platform to promote both their indignation and their innocence. The victims of the Keighley riot do not make themselves visible in the weeks following the riot. As we have seen, the Andrassy family left the town on Sunday morning. The press wrote that although he had dwelt in the town for many years, he was not a naturalised citizen. Upon the outbreak of war he had been routinely arrested by the police, but released as 'he found no difficulty in obtaining guarantees from well-known citizens as to his good character and conduct'.<sup>42</sup> We hear nothing in the press of Stein. Schulz was a naturalised Englishman. Nevertheless, he showed some signs of anticipating trouble, as he had 'taken the precaution for some days past

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<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 12 September, 1914.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 5 September, 1914.

to display in his window a copy of his certificate'.<sup>43</sup> Panayi recounts how the same tactic worked in London during the Lusitania riots. A Russian Jew named Schneiderman produced his naturalisation certificate to the belligerent crowd, which prevented further violence.<sup>44</sup> The crowd in Keighley was not so easily swayed, and proceeded to smash the shop. The display of the certificate echoed the adverts of Frank and Guest in Peterborough. It was Schulz's claim to belong. Andrassy, Schulz and Stein were all pork butchers, a trade rapidly becoming synonymous with German proprietors. As Panayi wrote of the Lusitania riots in Liverpool, 'the rioters destroyed the shops of all pork butchers, whether or not they were of German origin'.<sup>45</sup> The question of compensation for their damages was perhaps irrelevant, as who was even *liable* to pay for the Keighley damage was still being debated in late 1916.<sup>46</sup> The dilemma over refunding 'aliens' for damages will be discussed in reference to the Lusitania riots below. There seemed little option for these victims but to flee, or else to try and rebuild their businesses and brave the mob.

Prince Smith of course, was no pork butcher. His response to the rioting showed a certain alarm that even in the midst of anti-German hysteria, his role in the strike was still very much alive. As the town's relief fund struggled to cope with meagre donations and increasing distress, Smith made a very public £750 contribution.<sup>47</sup> A third of this he specified directly to be distributed in Keighley alone. Whilst the windows of Hillbrook's conservatory were still being repaired, it must have seemed like an obvious ransom to make sure that 'Darcy's Army' never rose again.

The authorities had the job of ensuring they did not. Panayi's overall conclusions on the authorities and the anti-German riots are sympathetic:

[the majority of] those in authority clearly did not encourage the disturbances. The judiciary, for instance, acted fairly and firmly in its

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<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> Panayi, *Enemy in our Midst*, p. 247.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 238.

<sup>46</sup> See PRO HO45/10944/257142/172-77.

<sup>47</sup> *KN*, 12 September, 1914.

sentencing. At the same time the police, both regular and special constables, performed their tasks correctly.<sup>48</sup>

The Keighley riots, on the whole, bear out Panayi's conclusions. The police, it appears, emphatically did not accept the rioters' plea to ignore their actions. The Chief Constable of Wakefield reported to the Home Office that though the riots had been 'a serious disturbance', the police had the matter 'well in hand'.<sup>49</sup>

What was the police's motivation for protecting the 'aliens' in Keighley? One major factor was the persistence of animosities born out of the strike violence. The police were unlikely to ignore the actions of those who may have escaped their attentions during the July disturbances. The scale and ferocity of the police action was markedly higher when the mob reached Prince Smith's residence. William Darcy himself appeared in the Borough Police Court several days after the riot with his head and left wrist in bandages, souvenirs of the trouble around 'Hillbrook'.<sup>50</sup>

Does this suggest that the police were more reticent in the face of anti-German violence? Several factors mitigate the idea of an outright bias on the part of the police. Only by Sunday, with the help of reinforcements from nearby Bradford, did the force have the numbers to cope with the crowd. Additionally, there is plenty of evidence that the police resisted the rioters and tried to protect the threatened shopkeepers. After the overtures of the rioters had been clearly ignored there were many shouts of '[t]he police are worse than the Germans for protecting them'.<sup>51</sup> The police were also alleged to have offered to fight the individuals who were throwing stones at them.<sup>52</sup> The clashes that followed on Monday saw no let up in police anger. James Marren claimed, that after being taken into custody, the police 'kicked him about like a football'.<sup>53</sup> The bitterness on either side did not melt away with the crowd. On Tuesday evening a small crowd assaulted a constable, as he patrolled 'one of the lowest quarters of the

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<sup>48</sup> Panayi, *Enemy in our Midst*, p. 257.

<sup>49</sup> PRO HO45/10944/257142/2a.

<sup>50</sup> *KN*, 5 September, 1914.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 12 September, 1914.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 10 October, 1914.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 5 September, 1914.

town'.<sup>54</sup> The police, already central figures in local tensions and rivalries, were acting in the midst of the riot itself. Subsequently, there seems little evidence of restraint in action against the anti-German rioters.

When the police had gathered the 'ringleaders', the authorities could begin to debate punishment. The words of the prosecution, defence and judiciary in the trials of the rioters further emphasise the question of legitimation and the tensions over the role of violence in the wartime community. The Mayor, who sat as magistrate in the trials days after the disturbances, was not in a conciliatory mood. The riot implied the worst excesses of the 'war fever', reported of the Berlin crowds, and decried and feared by so many in Britain. He identified the cause of the riot as 'indignation at the way in which some of the German Army had behaved to the country in which they found themselves', an indignation many shared. But he was emphatic that such dissatisfaction

was no excuse for English people here to attack in a cowardly and un-English way the houses of unfortunate Germans who happened to be in England. That, he felt sure was conduct for which every Englishman and every Keighley man would condemn.<sup>55</sup>

In sentencing, one looter was fined £2 and costs or one month's imprisonment. The offer to enlist, as in Peterborough, absolved punishment. Arthur Little, a former soldier, was told that gaol would have been certain but for his pledge to return to arms. The Mayor dismissed the case 'in consequence of the need for every man to serve his country'.<sup>56</sup>

Feelings were running high as the 'ringleaders' were tried at Keighley Borough Court. Several thousand assembled at the railway station to greet the prisoners from their remand at Armley gaol. The Mayor's instinctive denunciation of the riot was replaced in the courtroom by a more cautious debate that recognised the crowd's view of the violence being *right*. Constant references to legality, how

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<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

the common law 'did not allow the redressing of private grievances in this disgraceful way' suggested that the need to establish the fact the riot was *wrong* was the main aim of the authorities. Even the case for prosecution felt the need to state that '[w]hether the object of an unlawful assembly was lawful in itself or not, people were not enlisted to carry out their object by means of violent behaviour'.<sup>57</sup> Admittance by the prosecution that the 'object' of the riot – intimidating German residents in Britain – could be legitimate suggests how much concession had to be made to public opinion. Or perhaps the enthusiasm for the trial was waning. Two months later, at the sentencing in Wakefield, the prosecution stated that the riots 'were no credit either to the prisoners or to others who took part in them'.<sup>58</sup> The chair, in addressing the jury, summed up the official viewpoint:

[T]hey must not take Andrassey's nationality into account. The Law laid down that it was not the business of any private individual to attack any person, no matter what their nationality, so long as that person was keeping the peace. If anybody wanted to fight the Germans, the recruiting officer was the person to apply to.<sup>59</sup>

The sense of a discrepancy between attitudes to the anti-German and strike related violence is more pronounced in the judiciary than the police. To enlist was 'the right thing to do' according to the bench, and many of the Saturday rioters were simply bound over on this condition. Sunday's violence, however, was 'far more serious', and the chief protagonists faced gaol. Darcy was sentenced to three months. McGuinness and Jennings received a month each.

The case for the defence clearly gained the upper hand as the weeks passed. Men were needed for the front. The urgency of the war effort did not warrant a protracted and wasteful trial. In Keighley the defence attempted to normalise the violence, to place it more within the context of the heightened passions of wartime:

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<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 12 September, 1914.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 24 October, 1914.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*



[A] little common-sense and leniency would meet the case in times so exceptional as these, when people were reading about the happenings at the seat of war [...] We were all liable to war fever and all had our silly moments.<sup>60</sup>

At Wakefield the defence, a Mr. Prince, appealed to the same sentiments but clearly felt confident to discuss Andrassy's role in starting the riot. Though the pork butcher was undoubtedly respectable before the war, 'as soon as war broke out the man sided with his country and did his best to support all his country was doing'.<sup>61</sup> The 'cause of all the trouble' was the assault of Kelly. It appeared that Prince was not only playing to the gallery, but also the jury. The foreman of the twelve was moved to ask if a Constable Frankland, who was giving evidence, was German. Panayi's broad endorsement of the authorities must be subject to these small qualifications.

The local press was the staunchest critic of the riots. The *Keighley News* saw the riot as the latest disturbance in a town synonymous with violence:

A certain section of Keighley's inhabitants seem to be bent on gaining for the town an unenviable notoriety for hooliganism. With this section any excuse apparently will serve for raising a riot and destroying other people's property. A strike or a war, it is all one to them.<sup>62</sup>

The *News*, who said that to describe the unrest as 'war-riots, or even as anti-German demonstrations would be to do too much honour to the occasion', felt that the riots were of a similar ilk as the strike violence. Neither reflected the proper interests of either dispute. The destruction of property and incidents of looting proved this. Most clearly the riots were not patriotic or to be claimed as such. The 'true' patriot was fighting at the front:

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<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 12 September, 1914.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 24 October, 1914.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 5 September, 1914.

[*We shall win*] by the action of truly brave men meeting the enemy in the field and fighting him there, not by the outbursts of tap-room patriots and window smashing warriors whose courage cannot rise beyond the height of an attack in overwhelming numbers on helpless foreigners.<sup>63</sup>

If the riots were an attempt to dictate who belonged, the press denied their choice, and defended the Germans as their ‘fellow townsmen’.<sup>64</sup> The rioters themselves were ‘not in anyway representative of the great bulk of Keighley people’.<sup>65</sup> Reminding readers that the cost of the riots would mean a greater reliance on private charity, the *News* argued that violence undermined rather than furthered the war effort. The press, as in all the other spheres of the war, spoke their own persuasive narrative of the community at war. The riot was a chapter they were reluctant to write.

This chapter deals with the Keighley riot in much more depth than the other disturbances between the outbreak of war and the sinking of the *Lusitania*. In many ways Keighley is unrepresentative of much of the anti-German riots by virtue of its strike subtext. But, conversely, the legacy of the strike is what makes this riot so vital to our understanding of the role of collective violence in 1914. The Keighley riot does not suggest a distinctive break in behaviour contrived by the upheaval of war. In contrast, the persistence of disorder between July and August shows the *continuity* in the use of crowd violence in British society. On a basic level, the riot affirms a form of community. It requires the solidarity of a group, the uniting against a single enemy. Yet, as Suzanne Desan has suggested, crowd violence is an attempt to *transform* the community. The July strike riots sought to intimidate non-union workmen, to demonstrate that they did not belong. The smashing of windows and booing around Smith's house recast the territory of community, showing that Smith had forsaken inclusion by his actions. In the August riots, with the strike still very much in progress, Smith remains a target of the disorder. Andrassy and his fellow pork butchers are the new victims, having forsaken their inclusion by

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<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

virtue of their nationality. The war had partially transformed the community with regard to the Germans resident in Keighley; the anti-German violence sought to complete the process. Respected businessmen and their families were now made fugitive. Despite the vocal support of the press and authorities, they could not retain their status. That they escaped unhurt is an important feature – their windows seemed more at risk than their skins. The easiest way to transform the community was to mark out boundaries physically, and the smashing of shops achieved this. The expression of discontent over the presence of Germans in Keighley sat easily alongside discontent over the conduct of factory owners. Both had breached the norms of respectability required to fulfil their role in the community. Both suffered accordingly at the hands of the mob. The Keighley riot, and its local context, located the anti-German riots within a pre-war tradition of communal violence. For that reason alone it the most important of the 1914 riots.

### III – *‘feeling is steadily rising’*

Even if the battle of Mons can be seen as a milestone in the mood of the home front, the threat of riot on the scale of those in August 1914 was far from over. As the war progressed, and the anger towards Germany increased, few places found themselves immune. The additional marginalisation of any that sought to defend or support the ‘aliens’ was a natural consequence. In endorsing those already viewed as outside the community, they excluded themselves. The mob was always ready to mark them, and was no respecter of social status.

Mr. Midgely was the honorary secretary of the Saffron Walden hospital in Essex, and a Justice of the Borough. His wife sat on the Board of Guardians. Midgely was involved in the Relief Society for German residents in the country.<sup>66</sup> In mid-October two Germans were staying at his house. Resentment in the town grew throughout Friday 16 October to the extent that friends persuaded him to let the Germans return to London. This concession did not satisfy those making the rumours. The proximity of the Germans to the hospital, where several wounded

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<sup>66</sup> *Essex County Chronicle*(hereafter ECC), 23 October, 1914.

soldiers were being treated intensified the rancour. Midgely was even rumoured to be sabotaging the soldiers' tobacco supplies.<sup>67</sup>

On Saturday, Midgely's daughters went to the marketplace 'according to custom' to hold a religious meeting.<sup>68</sup> Here the accounts of the police and the press differ. The police report adds that Midgely's daughters were expressing pro-German sympathies in public at the meetings, and that they were alleged to have prayed for German success.<sup>69</sup> A crowd gathered, disrupting the meeting with 'patriotic songs, cheering and booing' and followed the speakers home.<sup>70</sup> The gathering had now swelled to nearly two thousand, and the crowd stood watch outside Midgely's house until midnight. Stones were thrown and several windows were smashed.

Saffron Walden's anti-German troubles will not feature among the major disturbances of 1914-18, yet it is a good example of the dynamics of collective unrest, and the threat of violence. The threat had already removed the German refugees, but the crowd still felt it had a role to play. The Midgely daughters were not in any physical danger from the meeting, but their accompanied journey home was a public humiliation. The smashing of windows and the vigil at Midgely's gates seemed enough to sate the crowd, who 'with the exception of the stone throwing were most orderly'.<sup>71</sup> No one in Saffron Walden would have been under any illusions as to who had transgressed the norms of the community. A noticeable feature of this unrest is the police's reaction, which was far less accommodating to the supporters of the 'aliens' than the 'aliens' themselves. There were no arrests, as the stone throwers were impossible to detect in the crowd. The police report was adamant that there was 'no doubt that Mr. Midgely, and the Misses Midgely, brought this trouble entirely upon themselves, by their provocative behaviour, and they have no sympathy'.<sup>72</sup> It seemed a genre of anti-German action was developing, with accepted rules and conventions. The

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<sup>67</sup> PRO HO45/10944/257142/16

<sup>68</sup> ECC, 23 October, 1914.

<sup>69</sup> PRO HO45/10944/257142/17

<sup>70</sup> ECC, 23 October, 1914.

<sup>71</sup> PRO HO45/10944/257142/17

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

police, and many others, clearly anticipated that Midgely's actions would provoke this, and merited the greatest irritation of the disturbance.

Seven days later, a major disturbance occurred at Crewe in north-west England. The shops of three Germans were smashed and looted. Two of the victims, named Gronbach and Reiss were naturalised Englishmen, and the third, a man named Bort, was a registered alien. The riot began on the night of Saturday 24 October, and continued until the early hours of Sunday morning.<sup>73</sup> There were several serious clashes between the crowd and police. Two soldiers who were helping the constables clear the streets required medical treatment from stones thrown.<sup>74</sup>

The testimony of the rioters was little different from elsewhere, the same mix of protested innocence and clear conscience. The police heard Joseph Stockton, a labourer, at the head of the crowd, shouting 'Shift the Germans!' He was fined 10s. and costs for being drunk and disorderly.<sup>75</sup> Norman Dale claimed he wasn't part of the riotous crowd at all, he was merely 'sight-seeing'. He was heard to shout, 'For God's sake don't rush the police'.<sup>76</sup> Henry Hinnet was charged with using abusive language and resisting the police. He was a national reservist, and appeared in court wearing 'an army decoration for service in South Africa'.<sup>77</sup> In his defence, Hinnet emphasised his intent to fight in France, stating 'I fought through Africa, and I am going to do my best in this'. He was fined 10s. and costs.<sup>78</sup> The military pretensions evident in Keighley were also a feature of the Crewe riot. A groom named Charles Jones was heard to shout 'Fall in and follow me' as the crowd moved from Gronbach's to Reiss's shop.<sup>79</sup> However, the major character of the riot was Thomas Worrall. He removed a six foot brass pole from Gronbach's shop, tied to it a Union Jack flag, and used the pole as a

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<sup>73</sup> CC, 7 November, 1914.

<sup>74</sup> PRO HO45/10944/257142/19.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> *Crewe and Nantwich Observer*, 31 October, 1914.

<sup>79</sup> CC, 7 November, 1914.

weapon to fend off police, striking a constable in the process. It became the standard for the crowd to follow. Worrall received a fine of over one pound.<sup>80</sup>

The victims, predictably, were not a vocal presence in the aftermath of the riot. It appears that Bort was already in a detention camp.<sup>81</sup> Reiss refused to press charges after some of his stolen goods – including a revolver that he claimed he used in his trade – were returned to him.<sup>82</sup> Gronbach's shop in Crewe was smashed, and he took the precaution of boarding up his other branch in nearby Nantwich.<sup>83</sup>

The Crewe riot did not compare in duration or size to the Keighley riot, and the reactions of the authorities reflect this. The Cheshire Chief Constable's report estimates the crowd at around one thousand, 'many of them girls and women and mere spectators'. Whilst there appeared to be little reticence from either side in the fighting outside Gronbach's shop, there was not the same animosity between police and public. A police constable intercepted a crowd of fifty or sixty 'young men and boys, some of whom were certainly not more than 14 years of age' on the way to Nantwich to Gronbach's other shop. They were persuaded by the constable to turn back, which suggests that the riot hadn't seriously undermined the authority of the police.<sup>84</sup> Reporting to the Home Office, the Chief Constable suggested order had been restored, but the local mood remained irate over 'aliens':

I do not anticipate a further outbreak, though I have no hesitation in saying that feeling is steadily rising against Germans who have been naturalised and against those born in England of German parentage, and that sudden outbreaks against such persons as the one now reported may be expected.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> PRO HO45/10944/257142/19.

<sup>82</sup> CC, 7 November, 1914.

<sup>83</sup> *Crewe and Nantwich Observer*, 31 October, 1914.

<sup>84</sup> PRO HO45/10944/257142/19.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

In court the words of the prosecution lamented that the violence occurred in Crewe, 'a town known all over the country for its good behaviour'. That passions were raised in wartime was understandable, but 'if the town was ruled by a mob, law and order would go'.<sup>86</sup> The punishments meted out were not severe, but neither were they reserved in the context of the war. Once again the exchange of frivolous violence for serious fighting at the front was made clear. The magistrate told the young men of Crewe 'that if they wanted a sphere for getting rid of their ebullitions of feeling, there was plenty of opportunity for young men in England to do so'.<sup>87</sup>

The local press weighed up carefully the anger at alleged German conduct in France and Belgium, but refused to endorse the violence. The *Liberal Chronicle* called the riots 'a passing ebullition of feeling, provoked by the brutal tactics of the German army'.<sup>88</sup> The paper had printed the six hundred killed or missing from the Cheshire regiment earlier that month, and had published several letters from Crewe soldiers at the front that presented the war with gruesome reality.<sup>89</sup> The *Chronicle's* editorial accepted that feeling in the town was 'therefore rather strong, although this was no justification for attacking the persons or property of law abiding German shop keepers in the town'.<sup>90</sup> The *Tory Observer* - who numbered the crowd at four times the estimate of the Chief Constable - emphasised the cost the riot would generate for rate-payers, but also the effect on local and national reputation. Respect and regret for Mr. Gronbach was evident, particularly in Nantwich, where the local correspondent reported that '[m]uch sympathy has been expressed for Mr. Gronbach in the special circumstances, his wife being in a delicate state of health'. However, the community seemed resolved:

It is recognised by the public, however, that there must be some hard cases, but the German subjects under detention are assumed at least of fair, English treatment, and the Germans who are thus segregated are only

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<sup>86</sup> CC, 7 November, 1914.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 3 October and 24 October, 1914.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 7 November, 1914.

victims of their own country's cunning treachery and espionage which is so foreign to British principles.<sup>91</sup>

The Crewe riot was provoked not from an alleged comment or incident, as in Peterborough or Keighley. It seemed to spark from an antipathy towards the 'aliens' growing out of the perceptions of war on the continent. The weeks after Mons and the Marne had seen the heroic tales of battle between two great armies reduced to the stark reality of casualty lists, and the grim accounts of the soldiers' letters. Placed alongside the constant refrain of atrocity stories, the mood was such that communities were transformed. Whilst the Keighley editorials resigned themselves to their town's violent reputation, Crewe's 'reputation for orderly behaviour' had been squandered, and it would take 'some time to live down the bad impression which has been created'.<sup>92</sup> The obvious existing esteem for a successful local businessman such as Gronbach dissipated rapidly – he and his wife were simply one of the 'hard cases' tainted by the brutality of their race. Their only solace appeared to be that they would be interned in a 'fair' English manner. Whilst the mood of the country was changing, the methods of violence were not. The participation of the youth of both sexes further identified anti-German violence with childish war fever. The rioters would graduate to the 'manly' fighting at the front. Again, the safety of the victims was not, it seemed, in doubt. The damage to property was the priority. When Superintendent Thompson challenged the pole-wielding Worrall as to why he was making for Bort's shop, even though the owner wasn't there, Worrall replied 'He's a German isn't he?' The marking of territory was more important than physical violence. Taken on its own, the Crewe riot could be written off as another isolated aberration, a 'feverish flush' as in Peterborough, or a reference to old rivalries, as in Keighley. Seven months later, the whole country would seem to be ablaze with fever.

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<sup>91</sup> *Crewe and Nantwich Observer*, 31 October, 1914.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*



#### IV – ‘Simply bent on pillage’? – The Lusitania Riots

The Lusitania riots were, in Panayi’s words, the ‘most widespread disturbances in twentieth-century British History’.<sup>93</sup> Panayi’s meticulous narrative of the Luistania riots will not be reproduced in this section. The Lusitania riots are at the climax of this study, and alongside events such as the forming of the coalition and the use of poison gas, represent the supposed transition towards ‘total war’. In this context, can we see the attitudes to violence changing? Are the methods of violence changing? Was there a ‘normalising’ of anti-German violence?

In some areas, the outbreak of violence was accepted with a nonchalance that suggested anti-German riots were becoming a common feature of the wartime landscape. Once more, Peterborough played host to unrest, as Mr. Frank’s shop again had its windows smashed. The *Citizen* reiterated that ‘[a]ll well-balanced minds condemn these extravagances as silly and useless’, but it was clear that the disturbances elicited little of the outrage of those the previous August.<sup>94</sup> The paper’s headline stated that only a ‘MILD EXHIBITION OF FEELING’ occurred. The Mayor walked among the crowd, reminding them that it was local ratepayers that would meet the cost of the disturbance, to little avail. Consolation was drawn from the fact that the violence was not personal; unrest was ‘confined to demonstrations against windows and furniture, and do[es] not touch human life’. The ‘young men’ involved would be ‘far better employed if they enrolled themselves’. Despite this belief in the division between rioters and soldiers, one of the stone-throwers was a private from the Essex regiment. However, Frank Newman was only sixteen, perhaps showing that the youth in uniform was much the same youth, at least until he saw battle.

Lusitania riots did not just occur in the larger cities. In Essex, several instances of rioting displayed both the variation and the recurring features of anti-German rioting. Despite a seeming national appetite for unrest, it is clear that the consensus was far from unequivocal. At Leyton, the Chairman of the Urban

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<sup>93</sup> P. Panayi, ‘Anti-German riots in Britain during the First World War’, in P. Panayi (ed.), *Racial Violence in Britain in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Leicester, 1993), p. 66.

<sup>94</sup> *PC*, 18 May, 1915. All following quotes in the paragraph derive from this source.

Council walked among the crowd, appealing on behalf of a Mr. Schmidt, who had been naturalised for thirty years, with two sons at the front. The crowd sang a chorus of 'For he's a jolly good fellow' and let him be, but 'practically all German and Austrian premises were visited and damaged', with the police making thirteen arrests.<sup>95</sup>

Neither was the cause of the rioting always solely that of the Lusitania affair. In Southend-on-Sea, a Zeppelin raid on Monday 10 May, which resulted in one death and a serious injury, fuelled mounting public animosities. There were rumours of violence throughout Wednesday morning, and a public meeting that night in favour of the internment of all Germans predictably raised passions, despite calls for calm. The size and mood of the crowd required all the local soldiers - some five battalions - to be called out to keep order. On arrival they were greeted with taunts of, 'going to help the Germans?' As the shop of Julius Wertheim was smashed, the shots of a revolver were said to be heard, though there were no injuries. Wertheim, a registered German, had been forced to move weeks before as Romford constituted a strategically prohibited area. One German barber displayed in his windows the notice that only British assistants were employed there, but this 'availed the proprietor of the shop nothing'.<sup>96</sup>

Amongst such a large crowd, a paltry four arrests were made. Only one of them could be termed a 'youth' - Alfred Pettitt, who was apprehended whilst throwing stones.<sup>97</sup> The others suggested more an enraged male *bourgeoisie*. Albert Cannon, an oil and colour merchant, admitted he fired the gun, though in court his defence was greeted with cheers.<sup>98</sup> George Vinten, a fishmonger, told police on the way to the station that he would give them 'no trouble', and that his actions were vengeance from the Zeppelin raid, in which his house had been damaged. In court, Vinten elaborated his statement with the phrase 'I did it as an Englishman' accompanied by loud applause in the court.<sup>99</sup> Charles Henry Jerrard, a wine merchant pleaded not guilty, excusing his actions by stating that,

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<sup>95</sup> ECC, 14 May, 1915.

<sup>96</sup> All quotes from this paragraph from *Southend-on-Sea Observer*, 19 May, 1915.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

after the air raid and the Lusitania, 'everyone who called himself an Englishman had the strongest feelings'. All the accused were bound over the following week.<sup>100</sup>

Despite the rather half-hearted way the rioters were prosecuted, there was still marked disapproval from the press. The *Southend-on-Sea Observer* hoped that 'by this time the futility of smashing the windows of Germans, or alleged Germans, has dawned upon some of the folk who engaged in it', reminding them that the cost fell upon ratepayers.<sup>101</sup> The public meeting was considered an unwise move of provocation. The message to the rioters remained the same: 'that if they felt keen on attacking Germans their best way to do it was to enlist'.<sup>102</sup> Southend's rioting possessed a motive of retribution - the Zeppelin raid - identified with the locality itself. Only Liverpool, with its links to the *Lusitania* ship, possessed a similar spur to violence with the May 1915 riots.<sup>103</sup> For the rest of the country, the nation-wide rioting suggested that the *Lusitania* 'outrage' could be interpreted as provocation for all. The fluid nature of the sense of community meant that retribution for a national grievance could be easily translated to the local. Thus the sinking of the *Lusitania* could be exorcised by the smashing of a local shop.

In an earlier chapter I lamented the fact that there were few accounts of the 'rush of food' by the hoarders themselves. With the *Lusitania* riots the historian is fortunate to possess the recollections of Pat O'Mara: the voice of a rioter.<sup>104</sup> O'Mara was a teenage Liverpudlian at the time of the riots, and the passage devoted to the event in his autobiography affords a detailed insight into the unrest. Much of his account bears out the themes of the anti-German riots discussed throughout this chapter. O'Mara heard the news of the *Lusitania*'s demise. Around his area of Liverpool 'practically every blind was drawn in token of death', with sailors who had perished on the ship. A large crowd was

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<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 26 May, 1915.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 19 May, 1915.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>103</sup> For a discussion of Southend's reaction to the Zeppelin raids, see Chapter Six, 'The Realities of War'.

<sup>104</sup> P. O'Mara, *The Autobiography of a Liverpool Slummy* (Liverpool, 1998; first published 1933).

gathering on Scotland Road, and was joined by an excited O'Mara and friends. The thrill of riot violence was palpable. As O'Mara remembers, '[s]omething was afoot; we could sense that and, like good slummy boys, we crowded around eager to help in any disturbance'.<sup>105</sup> Unlike some of the other examples of violence, the police were 'the most passive guardians of the law'. Perhaps the fierce nature of the Scotland Road area, allied to general public outrage, dampened any enthusiasm for immediate resistance.<sup>106</sup> The 'local' nature of the violence is a central factor. Though O'Mara was in the middle of a crowd in Liverpool, the national focus of the *Lusitania* riots, his exploits are based around a handful of streets. His victims are as familiar, in one case, as to be relatives. An existing community was being transformed by violence. O'Mara's mature, retrospective cynicism colours the crowd debates over who would be targeted, but still reveals the familiarity between rioter and victim. He recalls how one resident of thirty years standing was subject to 'a faint suspicion that years ago, anticipating such a riot, he had changed his name'.<sup>107</sup> One other German was spared on account of his popular Irish wife, who 'allers helped the church'.<sup>108</sup> As had been common since 1914, 'pork and Germany were identical terms' and pork butchers of any nationality presented the most obvious targets. O'Mara remembered feeling ill from all the sausage he had eaten, but looting again seemed merely a facet of the violence, rather than its cause.<sup>109</sup> The absence of serious violence continued. There were some scuffles, but the smashing of windows was enough. In one street the crowd 'left this old house practically wrecked, but no one hit the old couple'.<sup>110</sup> The role of the riots in manifesting the war in the locality was clear. O'Mara recounts how the foe of the staunch Irish quarter 'for the brief moment had changed from England to Germany'. The parodic military language evident in incidents such as 'Darcy's Army' seeps even into O'Mara's final conclusions. 'If Germany had torpedoed the *Lusitania*, we certainly had torpedoed everything German in our immediate vicinity – certainly all the pork butchers' shops'.<sup>111</sup> From the voice of the rioters

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<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 163.

<sup>106</sup> The police were not slow to prosecute the following day. See *Ibid.*, p. 167.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 164.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 165.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 167.

themselves, legitimate vengeance had been wreaked. Few could doubt who no longer belonged.

Sylvia Pankhurst's inter-war reminiscences show at least that radical interpretations of crowd behaviour were not changing. Like Hobson and Masterman during the Boer War, Pankhurst was convinced that the violence was planned and manipulated:

The meanest element among the jingoes worked up the first of the anti-German riots [*following the sinking of the Lusitania*]. These were deliberately organised, in no sense a spontaneous popular outburst; but the prospect of looting without fear of punishment made its appeal to certain sections of the poor and ignorant.<sup>112</sup>

Pankhurst, like her predecessors, was unable to accept that popular outbursts could be reactionary. They were engendered by the exhortations of the press, with view to harsher measures of internment. Yet though 'organised from without', the riot became 'a hunger riot.' The rioters - in Pankhurst's view 'women and children who snatched bread' stole food 'not from hatred of Germany, but because they were hungry.'<sup>113</sup> Panayi's mapping of the social geography of the riots shows that similar unrest occurred in wealthier areas than Pankhurst's deprived East End, and the issue of food rioting has been discussed above with regard to Keighley and Peterborough.<sup>114</sup> Yet Pankhurst's account does reflect the strangely non-personal nature of the violence. One woman 'saw her husband, her son and daughter, dragged out of the house by the mob.' Although 'a day of agonised suspense ensued', the three rejoined her apparently unhurt.<sup>115</sup>

Did the press engineer the riot? It may have appeared a convincing argument to distressed contemporaries like Pankhurst, when they read columns such as

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<sup>112</sup> Pankhurst, *The Home Front*, p. 170. See also Hobson, *The Psychology of Jingoism* (London, 1901).

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 171.

<sup>114</sup> Panayi, *Enemy in our midst*, p. 237.

<sup>115</sup> Pankhurst, *The Home Front*, p. 170.

Horatio Bottomley's 'vendetta' editorial for *John Bull*.<sup>116</sup> Yet Panayi's sensible discussion of the problems with the historian placing responsibility with the press needs no expansion here.<sup>117</sup> Furthermore, Bottomley's editorial reflected merely an extreme expression of the sentiments and ideas current in both the riot violence and in the general experience of the Great War. Bottomley, in calling for naturalised Germans to wear a 'distinctive badge' to denote themselves, hoped to achieve what the smashing of windows also accomplished: the marking of who *belonged*. In addition, he was pursuing a need on the Home Front for all to be identified according to their inclusion, and contribution to the war effort. As discussed elsewhere in this thesis, such systems of identification persisted in the practice of enlistment, employment, and mourning.<sup>118</sup> Bottomley spoke violently of belonging. There were plenty ready to undertake the violence.

Many however, like Pankhurst, were convinced that press campaigns inspired the riots. The home office received an anonymous letter from West London on May 15 detailing the how a bakery close to their residence 'was wrecked and looted by a disorderly mob from Notting Dale, simply bent on pillage'.<sup>119</sup> The cost for local ratepayers caused particular ire, but the writer reserved their anger for the 'incitement to lawlessness and disorder of a large proportion of the press'.<sup>120</sup> The front page from the *Daily Sketch* was included in the letter as an example. As respectable opinion was so outraged at the time, it is beneficial to examine the page in detail to see what merited the charge 'incitement'. In addition, we can ask what this press coverage tells us about the perceptions of riot violence? How is it explained in relation to the dichotomy between childish rioting and 'manly' soldiering? The *Sketch* was a predominantly pictorial paper, so the clues derive from captions and slogans as well as the images themselves.

The first feature to note is that the offending page is reporting, rather than exhorting violence. Yet the *Sketch*'s editorial viewpoint is nailed, literally, to the

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<sup>116</sup> *John Bull*, 15 May, 1915, *cit.* Panayi, 'Anti-German riots in Britain during the First World War', pp. 73-74.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>118</sup> See 'Pageantry of War' chapter.

<sup>119</sup> PRO HO45/10944/257142/54

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*

masthead, which states: 'GAOL IS THE HOME FOR THE HUN IN WARTIME'. The sense that riot violence was considered 'unmanly' is clear in the way the role of women as rioters was portrayed. One picture is captioned 'Women in Kentish Town defy the police and territorials to prevent them wrecking a German baker's shop'. The picture shows men, women, police and territorials all smiling at the camera. The involvement of women and children in an attack on a Poplar tobacconists is emphasised in a picture that features men. Justification for the riots is framed from the perspective of mothers. The parodic military language only seems to work for the *Daily Sketch* when related to women. The looted goods of women are dubbed "Spoils of war in Polar". More importantly, the rioting is claimed to be 'the women's only chance to show their hatred of German barbarity'. Their animosity was not personal, but more a symbolic act that *included* women in the fight against all Germans: 'It wasn't that these women hated the trader, but he was of the nation that poisons their sons'.<sup>121</sup>

#### V – *The violence of belonging*

The Lusitania riots were only new in terms of scope. Much of the earlier anti-German violence had been contained within a single locality, yet May 1915 became a cumulative expression of unrest. The sinking of the Lusitania provoked a level of outrage that atrocity stories, casualty lists and naval losses failed to arouse. Neither was the loss of 'innocents' on board the Lusitania a new factor, although admittedly the number of casualties was unmatched at that stage of the war. The deaths suffered in the East Coast bombardment, an actual encroachment on the English mainland, had provoked little direct retribution to German residents. The sinking of the Lusitania appeared to distil all the perceived evil of German 'Kultur' into one event. That it coincided with the growing intensity and awareness of the war was clearly a factor in the way it so easily became an affront that could be felt throughout the country.

The method and aims of the violence seem little different to the small crowds that ran abroad in Peterborough during that first heady week of the war. The

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<sup>121</sup> *Daily Sketch*, 13 May, 1915.

smashing of windows, the marking of property, the re-mapping of the boundaries of community were the objectives. Nor, with reference to Pat O'Mara, can we also discount the hedonistic thrill of crowd action. Throughout this study we have seen the attempts of official voices to make the war real and apparent to the populace. The riots were the speech of unofficial voices. The conduct in the riots of those that could fight was decried, redeemed only by the undertaking of 'manly' soldiering. For many that could not fight, or had no conception of the continental war, the conflict had to be assimilated into everyday life. The Poplar women, attacking shops of which they were doubtless frequent customers, were contributing to the war in terms of their face to face locality. The use of martial images and language to make sense of their actions reflects that the press recognised this.

Behind all discussions of the anti-German riots is the vital consideration that we do not assess them solely as the actions of a people 'brutalised' by being at war. As with the questions of 'war enthusiasm' or military expectations, we cannot afford to view August 1914 as the commencement of these events. In examining the first months of war, this study naturally also sketches a portrait of British society 'on the eve'. Here - and Keighley in July 1914 is one such example - we can see that violence was a fact in Edwardian England: in the locality, in politics, in industrial disputes.<sup>122</sup> It would never fail, therefore, to be a fact in wartime when a sizeable German minority was settled in many English towns. Neither would it fail to reflect existing methods and aims of group violence against an *other*. Simultaneously we cannot claim unchanged cultural meanings from E.P. Thompson's eighteenth-century food rioters. The riots spoke from an existing repertoire common to all contemporaries, but the circumstances of the anti-German riots were inseparable from the situation of war in 1914. The questions of display, inclusion, calm and unity - that recurs constantly throughout this entire study - was at the heart of the riots.

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<sup>122</sup> For their comments upon these conclusions I must thank Clive Elmsley, Mike Finn and others at the History of Violence conference at Liverpool, July 2001. For an assessment of violence in Edwardian politics see J. Lawrence, *Speaking for the People* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 188-193.



## Chapter Six

### *The Realities of War*

In our 'rolling narrative' of the Great War, the division in experience between combatant and civilian forms one of the most potent chapters. The gulf between 'Wipers' and 'Blighty' is unassailable. Trench warfare was, for civilians, little more than the distant rumble of guns on the Kent coast. The soldiers who returned met grating bellicosity and condescension from a public desperately uninformed about the conflict. Like all strands of our myth-narrative, the civilian/combatant divide derives from some of our 'sacred texts' of 1914-18. Owen, the talismanic voice of the Great War, speaks to a nation for whom 'Dulce Et Decorum Est' was a bedrock, a watchword. His poem petitioned their ignorance ('If in some smothering dreams *you* could...'; 'If *you* could hear...'¹), the bugle call of the phrase sounding flat alongside the brutal images of 'real' war. Sassoon's view of those out of the firing line is of contempt: the bluff Major in 'Base Details', or the people who 'will always be kind' to the crippled soldier in 'Does it Matter?'² Women – non-combatant by definition – merit the keenest scorn for Sassoon in 'The Glory of Women'. Those who 'listen with delight' at tales of the 'distant ardours', those 'can't believe that British troops 'retire'' personify the divide between soldier and civilian.³ Sassoon was prey to the same sentiments before he crossed that divide, as Robert Graves recalls:

I had one or two drafts [*of his latest poems*] and showed them to Siegfried. He frowned and said that war should not be written about in such a realistic way. In return, he showed me some of his own poems. One of them began:

*Return to greet me, colours that were my joy,  
Not in the woeful crimson of men slain...*

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¹ W. Owen, 'Dulce Et Decorum Est', *The Penguin Book of First World War Poetry* (London, 1979), pp. 192-193. Emphasis added.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 123-134.

Siegfried had not yet been in the trenches. I told him, in my old soldier manner, that he would soon change his style.<sup>4</sup>

What has become the most generic symbol of the alienation of combatant from civilian is the soldier returning home, where even family ties can never be the same again. In *All Quiet on the Western Front*, the episode of Paul Baumer's leave demonstrates how the idyll of home and childhood is rendered alien and unfamiliar.<sup>5</sup> His old schoolmasters patronise him on the progress of the war, he can only tell his father diluted stories of the front. With his mother and sister the breach is palpable on a much deeper level:

I breathe slowly in and out and say to myself, 'You are home, you are home.' But there is an awkwardness that will not leave me, I can't get used to everything yet. There is my mother, there is my sister [...] - but I am not quite there myself yet. There is a veil and a few steps between me and them.<sup>6</sup>

Sassoon found solace in rejoining his regiment. Remarque's Baumer felt a more familial love in the company of his comrades. The absence of war, and the upheaval of the soldier returning at the war's close is presented in Richard Aldington's short story, *The Case of Lieutenant Hall*.<sup>7</sup> The strain of protracted demobilisation, added to Hall's own guilt over his war experience, results in depression and eventual suicide. 'It is very strange,' remarks Hall's fictional diary, 'returning to England, civilian life and ways, after the tremendous physical and moral efforts of the last few years.'<sup>8</sup> Hall is damned by civilian life as the soldier failing to shed the 'extravagant' living of the army and rejecting the

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 132.

<sup>4</sup> R. Graves, *Goodbye to All That* (London, 1929), p. 112.

<sup>5</sup> E. Maria Remarque, *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1929; translated by B. Murdoch, 1996), pp. 110-132.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 115.

<sup>7</sup> R. Aldington, 'The Case of Lieutenant Hall: Extracts from a diary', from T. Tate (ed.), *Women, Men and the Great War* (Manchester, 1995), pp. 77-91. Originally published in Aldington's *Roads of Glory* (1930).

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 88.

normality of peace. The further the combatant is from the intensity of the front, the more isolated and marginalized he becomes.

Philip Gibbs was a non-combatant. But his position as a journalist left him somewhere between the two extremes. The ‘realities of war’ he portrayed were not those that Graves or Sassoon experienced, but he spoke of his own antipathy to those ‘back home’. Gibbs, documenting the war as it happened, nearly a decade before the war memoirs emerged, seemed to possess a dual sense of alienation. Whilst his admiration was unreserved for the men whose stories he told – and could not share – his rancour was saved for those who read his censored reports:

[...] as an onlooker, I could not be just or fair, and hated the non-combatants who did not reveal its [*the effect of war*] wound in their souls, but were placid in their belief that we should win, and pleased with themselves because of their easy optimism. So easy, for those who did not see!<sup>9</sup>

Paul Fussell documents how these words of war reflected a development of ‘the *versus* habit’: *us* against *them*, *night* against *day*, staff officers to front-line troops.<sup>10</sup> These polarities became touchstones of the post-war ironic style. Nowhere was the estrangement more complete than trench versus home. With such eloquent testimonies creating this powerful myth, it is little wonder that attacks on British civilians in the Great War have drifted from our narrative. It is to these events we now turn.

Throughout this study, we have encountered clues suggesting the gulf between soldier and civilian was not so large. We have seen how atrocity stories, despite their questionable authenticity, created the image of a gruesome opponent. More importantly, we have seen the appearance of wounded men within civilian society, whose bodies spoke of the debilitating effects of war. We have read how the

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<sup>9</sup> P. Gibbs, *Realities of War* (London, 1920), p. 32.

letters of combatants, published in the local press, give explicit descriptions of killing and maiming. Nor can we discount the memory of the South African War that, despite the declamations of those veterans returning from Mons, was certainly no 'picnic'. We have seen how the *threat* of naval raids and invasion affected trades such as fishing and tourism on the East Coast.<sup>11</sup> This chapter discusses the most important qualification to the civilian/combatant divide – the incidents in which the English civilian population suffered the 'realities of war'. By the standards of the Second World War, the casualties are few and the frequency of attacks paltry in comparison. Yet they constitute an important, and under-examined, factor in the experience of the home front in the Great War.

War reaching the British Isles did not seem, in 1914, to be a fear in the minds of all but the more hysterical commentators. The debates of the 'crisis' period over British neutrality suggested a continental war that had little to do with the empire. The arguments for war in July and August, as we have seen, sprang from calls to honour a treaty and defend a violated land. Alarm over invasion was not an overriding concern in the first months of war. The battle that would dwarf Waterloo would occur in more or less the same territory. Belgian atrocity stories were often invoked as to what would happen if the Germans ever invaded Britain, but the push of recruitment was not aimed at Home Service. Reinforcements for the continental army were the priority.

The naval raid of December 1914 – the most costly in terms of loss of life - and the commencement of the Zeppelin raids in January 1915 fit within the chronology of this study. To an important extent the 'realities of war' emphasise the thesis that the home front experience was not homogeneous. The chapter will examine the impact of these attacks on the communities at war. We have discussed the ways in which the conflict was manifested symbolically on the street corner, from the sermon to the riot. How did communities make sense of the 'real' appearance of war on their own doorsteps? The discussion begins with the first military 'incident' to affect the British mainland, at Yarmouth in 1914.

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<sup>10</sup> P. Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford, 1975), pp. 79-82.

## I – ‘The spectacle of the flames and explosions’ – Yarmouth, November 1914

On the morning of Tuesday, November 3, four German cruisers made their way towards the East Coast. A twenty-minute bombardment commenced, of which all the shells fell short. In the ensuing pursuit a British submarine was lost. The following day the steam drifter *Copious* was sunk by a mine with the loss of eight crew. The *Times History of the War*, evaluating the raid in 1915, was reserved in its summation. Subsequent events at Hartlepool, Scarborough and elsewhere had diminished concern over this flawed mission. The incident ‘created less concern than might have been anticipated in England’. There was ‘[s]ome surprise’ that the ships had penetrated the navy’s blockade, yet considered opinion was ‘that it would be a mistake to attach too much significance to the raid or to say too much about it’.<sup>12</sup> Naval historian Arthur Marder dismisses the raid as ‘a mine laying operation with the coastal bombardment as a sideshow’.<sup>13</sup>

Naturally, in Yarmouth, the sideshow was keenly attended. Yet confusion reigned rather than fear. At 7 o’clock, as the bombs began, and hundreds began to gather around the seafront. The gunfire was close enough to be made out, yet the ships were far too distant. Immediately the territorials were called out, but there was little to do but watch events unfold. According to the *Yarmouth Independent*, ‘[t]he spectacle of the flames and the explosions was weird in the extreme, the arc cut in the sky by the swift shell could be easily seen and the air was shaken by detonations’.<sup>14</sup> Amongst this chaos, there were numerous fishing boats sailing across the bay, seemingly oblivious. Observers estimated that the cascades of water from the shells varied between fifty and eighty feet, and ‘appeared to be like great pieces of coal dropping from the heavens’. These sights were clearly exciting, ‘and if it had not been for the fact that the lives of

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<sup>11</sup> See Chapter Three, ‘Business as Usual?’

<sup>12</sup> *The Times history of the war I* (London, 1915), Vol. II, p. 362.

<sup>13</sup> A.J. Marder, *From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow: The Royal Navy in the Fisher era, 1904-1919 vol. II: The war years: To the eve of Jutland* (Oxford, 1965), p. 130.

some of our gallant British soldiers hung on a very thin thread many would have enjoyed the experience'. The seriousness of the incident was made plain by the return of two submarines of three that had set out – 'it needed no trained eye to see that a catastrophe had occurred'.

'Was Yarmouth Shelled?' asked the leader of the *Independent* on the Saturday following the incident. Uncertainty over the question was clearly implied in the need for the editor's opinion which had to be 'an emphatic – yes!' Yet no one was in doubt that an important episode had occurred. The bombing, rumoured or real, meant that the 'nerves of many people were slightly shattered', and throughout Tuesday 'a certain amount of nervous excitement prevailed'. The existing suspicion over outsiders was clearly intensified in the wake of the affair, and 'two alleged spies' were rounded up that afternoon. A large crowd gathered outside the police station, only to find that the suspected villains were actually travelling Mormons. No immediate local scapegoat could therefore be found though the *Independent* pronounced that, Germans aside, the Mormons 'really are not wanted in Yarmouth'. Panic travelled further afield. The 'wildest rumours were afloat in Cambridge' the same day, and large crowds gathered outside the *Cambridge Daily News* offices to hear the latest news.<sup>15</sup>

Some aspects of the day were not new. Attention was directed on the casualties that resulted from the sinking of the *Copious*, a fishing boat that fell victim to the mines. Photographs of the lost local men and an interview with the lone survivor showed that, despite the novelty of the raid, the danger of wartime seafaring was still the most current.<sup>16</sup>

In view of what came later, it is perhaps appropriate for naval historians such as Arthur Marder to term the Yarmouth incident a 'sideshow'. However, many themes of the reaction to the later bombings first found expression after Yarmouth. Perceptions of the war were clearly affected. The *Independent*

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<sup>14</sup> *Yarmouth Independent* (hereafter *YI*), 7 November, 1914. All subsequent quotes from this issue.

<sup>15</sup> *Cambridge Daily News* (hereafter *CDN*), 4 November, 1914.

commented that ‘the grim realities of war have been brought home to Yarmouth people perhaps more this week than at any period during the war’. Continental gunfire had been heard before, but on Tuesday morning the sound was ‘too near to be comfortable’. Criticism of the authorities began to be voiced, with concerns over government leniency in regard to the spy question.<sup>17</sup> The rewards of hardship were also discussed. The fame of being involved in bombing is emphasised in the editor’s ‘emphatic yes’ claim, which suggested a new and exciting passage in Yarmouth’s war record. The considered and sensible reaction of the people, always a key concern throughout the first months of war, was celebrated. The reports of wavering nerves were clearly cowardly exceptions to the rule. In the aftermath of the later East Coast raids, the vicar of nearby Gorleston ‘rejoiced to find his parishioners so cool. The only ones who got hysterical over invasion and shellfire were the poltroons who had howled for the cutting down of the army and navy’.<sup>18</sup> The balance sheet of rewards and hardship would be more difficult to calculate if there was a more serious raid. At a Cambridge recruiting meeting, one speaker warned, ‘[w]hat the Germans did the previous day in approaching Yarmouth they meant to try some day in a big way’.<sup>19</sup> Six weeks later, further up the East Coast, the most costly raid of the whole war occurred.

## II – ‘While it lasted, how terrible it was’ – The naval raid December 1914

Naval intelligence knew a raid was being planned. In the early hours of Wednesday 16 December, British ships ran into German destroyers, commencing ‘a confused, intermittent close-range action’ that lasted several hours.<sup>20</sup> Around 8 o’clock, the shelling of the Hartlepoons began. At a similar time, Scarborough too was shelled. The ships that shelled the Hartlepoons made their escape via Whitby, where a bombardment was initiated just after nine o’clock. On a foggy day, the

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<sup>16</sup> *YI*, 7 November, 1914.

<sup>17</sup> *YI*, 14 November, 1914.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 26 December, 1914.

<sup>19</sup> *CDN*, 5 November, 1914.

<sup>20</sup> Marder, *From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow*, p. 135.

raiders eluded the British navy, and – laying numerous mines – managed to reach safety in the ensuing pursuit.<sup>21</sup>

In the Hartlepoons, many were rising or breakfasting as the attack began. The first reaction among many was that the disturbance marked the sound of the artillery practice at the nearby gun emplacement. Such noise was not unknown. Indeed, in the preceding weeks ‘one section of the citizens of Hartlepool had gravely protested against the guns and the gun practice of the fort’.<sup>22</sup> Yet ‘that comfortable explanation’ was soon dissipated by ‘the whizz of shells coming shorewards and making a sound like wind against telegraph wires’.<sup>23</sup> George Jobling, speaking at the inquest the following day, heard the sound of guns:

“I never thought it was the Germans,” said the old gentleman. “I thought they were ours practising. I went to the door and saw the people running round. I turned into the house again. I was just going to get a drop of tea when all at once smash went the corner of the house. I was knocked to the other side. It took me a few moments to recover. When I did so I went round to the door, and found three children among a lot of bricks, two of them being my son’s children. They had been killed by a shell which struck my house.”<sup>24</sup>

The ships were thought to be aiming for the water tower and the gasworks, but the shells ripped through residential areas in both Hartlepool and West Hartlepool. People filled the streets in panic, many making for the police station, the railway or simply fleeing the town. Soldiers of the Durham Light Infantry braved the guns and attempted to return fire from the shore batteries, making themselves a target for the German destroyers. Varying sources estimated that the bombardment lasted as briefly as fifteen, or as long as forty-five minutes in duration. The *Yorkshire Post* felt that the ‘tremendous wave of excitement that

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<sup>21</sup> For a detailed naval commentary see *Ibid.*, pp. 135-142, and W. Churchill, *The World Crisis 1911-1918* (London, 1923), pp. 292-302.

<sup>22</sup> *The Times History of the War*, vol. 2, p. 378.

<sup>23</sup> *Yorkshire Post* (hereafter *YP*), 16 December, 1914.

<sup>24</sup> *Northern Daily Mail* (hereafter *NDM*), 17 December, 1914.



swept across the port might well excuse' the inconsistency.<sup>25</sup> Twenty five miles away in the village of Staindrop, people were 'sure it was thunder, as the windows rattled so much'.<sup>26</sup>

Further down the East Coast, shells rained on Scarborough. The cliff-top medieval castle was a clear target, and at several points the '10 foot walls were shattered as mere timber'. The nearby coastguard station was 'blown to pieces', and an eyewitness on the cliff claimed he could see six vessels in the bay. For over thirty minutes, shells smashed into houses and hotels upon the seafront and throughout the town. A Scarborough businessman was making his way to the railway station when he saw 'great shells tearing over the town'.<sup>27</sup> As in Hartlepool, people thronged the streets, trying to escape, as 'splinters of shells were flying about in all directions'.<sup>28</sup> Harold Hainsworth, a Bradford merchant staying at the Waverley Hotel, spoke of the 'great excitement' as '[s]hell after shell burst over the town'. Hainsworth felt the shells 'were obviously aimed at the railway station, and were not far from missing their mark'.<sup>29</sup> The severity of the bombardment was reflected in the distance over which the sound of the guns carried. In Bridlington, some fifteen miles to the south, the shelling was 'heard distinctly', beginning at just before eight o'clock. Many in the coastal town were 'alarmed at the vibration from the guns rattling the house window, and in one or two instances it was said panes of glass had been broken'.<sup>30</sup> At the town of Malton, twenty-two miles inland, 'frequent booming' rattled windows, thought to have started around twenty past eight.<sup>31</sup>

Whitby was the last town to be bombed, the first shell reported at five past nine. The bombardment 'lasted about seven minutes, and during the whole of that time the shells came hurtling over the town with a noise like that of claps of thunder'.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> *YP*, 16 December, 1914.

<sup>26</sup> *NDM*, 19 December, 1912.

<sup>27</sup> *Leeds Mercury* (hereafter *LM*), 17 December, 1914.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *The Scarborough Mercury* (hereafter, *SM*), 18 December, 1914.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *NDM*, 17 December, 1914.

Shells struck the signalling station on the cliffs and a hole was blown in the walls of the old Abbey. More shells fell in the town near the railway station, the schools and the police station, where the projectiles 'made holes in the ground large enough to have buried a horse in'.<sup>33</sup> One shell was found three miles inland, at the village of Sleights. After 'delivering their devastating message, they suddenly turned to the east and disappeared in the mist, as silently as they had come'.<sup>34</sup>

The raids lasted little more than thirty minutes, but the panic understandably longer. In the Hartlepoons, citizens sought to assess the human cost of the raid:

Sorrow, in fact, has entered so many homes, and the street scenes of the deadly half-hour in the morning were so ghastly, that the twin towns are for the moment stunned and damaged.<sup>35</sup>

By five o'clock in the evening the police had numbered the death toll at approaching fifty. The Cameron hospital dealt with 160 cases, 60 of them serious enough to be 'detained'.<sup>36</sup> The hospital staff, augmented by other doctors from the town, worked from nine in the morning until midnight. In Scarborough, as the bombardment came to a close, many delayed their escape and examined the damage done. People 'flocked out into the streets to inspect the damaged properties, and hunting for fragments of shells as souvenirs became a rage with many'.<sup>37</sup> The seafront was thronged with thousands surveying the bombed town. For the rest of the morning, the Post Office was packed with people sending telegrams to friends. The bombardment was over, and the news began to spread.

Those in the surrounding district, many areas having been within earshot of the bombardment, had their fears confirmed by those who fled from the shelled towns. At Malton 'rumours were speedily circulated to the effect that the much

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *YP*, 16 December, 1914.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *SM*, 18 December, 1914.

talked about invasion by the German had at last taken place'.<sup>38</sup> Concerned relatives sought aid of the Post Office, only to find that all communications with Scarborough and Whitby were down. Speculation ended with the nine o'clock train from Scarborough, where a stream of passengers bore the shocking news. The escapees 'presented a pitiable spectacle', in various states of undress, and 'many had left everything behind them'.<sup>39</sup> Many were taken in by onlookers anxious to hear their stories. One vet told how his house was struck, and how his 'inmates' escaped. Two women spoke of how the 'castle ruins had been demolished', and the Burniston barracks shelled. Another remembered seeing a shell bursting near marching troops. The train driver of the Whitby to Malton train claimed a falling shell narrowly missed the train.<sup>40</sup> Successive trains brought more 'frightened and distressed', and cars passed through the town headed further inland. A 'former Malton gentleman' drove through the town from Scarborough, revealing how he had seen 'a man killed by a shell and another wounded'. People began to pass in the other direction, and many set out from Malton to 'see what havoc had been wrought'.<sup>41</sup>

Trains stopping at York 'were filled with refugees', many 'with nothing more than what they stood up in'.<sup>42</sup> In Hull, a 'thrilling narrative' was relayed by arriving passengers. James Harvey Scott told of how he thought at first that British ships were practising. On his way to the station, he had to stop numerous times to shelter from the shells. He left a Scarborough 'enveloped in dense smoke'.<sup>43</sup> It seemed that '[n]early every train arriving in Leeds from Scarborough and Whitby during the day brought people fleeing the dreaded danger'.<sup>44</sup> Many sought relatives and friends in the cities, and it was thought that several hundred 'fugitives' made the journey. When, later in the day, the danger faded, many began to return. Accompanying them were many who bought day excursion

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<sup>38</sup> *LM*, 17 December, 1914.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> *YP*, 17 December, 1914.

<sup>43</sup> *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, 16 December, 1914.

<sup>44</sup> *SM*, 18 December, 1914.

tickets, 'evidently considering a display of shellfire an added attraction' to the seaside towns.<sup>45</sup>

News spread further afield. Incredulity was the reaction fifty miles inland at the market town of Knaresborough, where news of the bombardment was treated as 'something in the nature of a joke'. But at midday, a telegram verifying the news was posted in a shop window, 'causing great excitement'. Further proof was offered by the arrival of an eye-witness, who brought with him a piece of shrapnel. A lady, seeking her relatives, arrived in Bradford in the late morning with three children and gave her account of the raid.<sup>46</sup> Most of the north was informed by eye-witnesses, but in the capital the news was widespread before any victims of the bombardment could tell their story. Arthur Wood, with his wife and son, arrived at King's Cross station at ten past five in the evening. Wood and his twelve year old son had been wounded by shrapnel, and 'each had his head swathed in bandages'.<sup>47</sup> Wood gave the *Daily News* a comprehensive picture of a town with 'one hundred houses in flames'.

A mix of eye-witness accounts and hearsay spread across the whole country. At around half past eleven, F.A. Robinson, hearing the rumours in Surrey, was convinced that a major naval engagement was in progress.<sup>48</sup> The Rev. Andrew Clark heard vicariously:

4 p.m. [...] the Tufnells of Langleys, Great Waltham, report German bombardment of Scarborough and Hartlepool, but 'our fleet is in attendance'. (It was Mrs. Bristowe, a country lady who made use if the delightful phrase 'our fleet...')<sup>49</sup>

News of the raid did not deter Vera Brittain from a shopping trip in Manchester. At the end of the day, her diary reported fifty shells falling on Scarborough, and

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<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> *Bradford Daily Argus* (hereafter *BDA*), 16 December, 1914.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> F.A. Robinson, unpublished diary, IWM.

nine killed at Hartlepool. In her opinion, '[n]o doubt a naval engagement is in process of the coast of Scarborough, but the hand of the censor has been at work'. Brittain remarked on the fact that 'except for small riots & insurrections, there has been no fighting in this country for over a century'.<sup>50</sup> The public craved news of this historic event.

### III – 'The situation is developing'

The Admiralty telegram gave little away:

German movements of some importance are taking place this morning in the North Sea. Scarborough and Hartlepool have been shelled, and our flotillas have at various points been engaged. The situation is developing.<sup>51</sup>

Due to the demands of the Censor, no descriptions of the raid could be published in the local press of Scarborough or the Hartlepools. Some reassurance was offered. The *Scarborough Mercury* claimed that 'although we have never denied the possibility of a raid, we think anything worse than this is highly improbable'.<sup>52</sup> But the frustration of newspapermen able to publish little more than this was palpable. Samuel Storey, whose column on military aspects of the war was published in papers such as the *Northern Daily Mail* and the *Sunderland Daily Echo*, was baffled as to the secrecy:

The Censor, however, requests that none of these reports [*of the raid*] should be in the meantime published, which seems rather absurd, as they were definite and correct reports of undoubted facts.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> J. Munson (ed.), *Echoes of the Great War: The Diary of the Reverend Andrew Clark 1914-1919* (Oxford, 1988), p. 38.

<sup>50</sup> A. Bishop (ed.), *Vera Brittain's War Diary 1913-1917* (London, 1981), p. 131.

<sup>51</sup> Printed in *NDM*, 16 December, 1914.

<sup>52</sup> *SM*, 16 December, 1914.

<sup>53</sup> *NDM*, 16 December, 1914.

The next day Storey regretted that he ‘could have sent for his readers a very illuminating account of what had taken place’, but the Censor ‘ordered that nothing but official news could be reported’.<sup>54</sup> The spread of news across the country meant that the press could do little to meet the public demand for news. In Brighouse in West Yorkshire, the *Echo* editor recounted how the news had reached the town by noon, yet it was the evening before papers carried any reports, and ‘they were far from satisfying’:

Even a Scarborough newspaper to hand, published about teatime, contains only the bare announcements of the Press Bureau in London. What a tantalising position for an enterprising journalist to be in - copy, miles of it, and yet not able to use a line that was not officially sanctioned.<sup>55</sup>

Evening papers like the *Yorkshire Post* and the *Huddersfield Examiner* were able to print some reports, but the following day the most detailed accounts of the raid - and the extent of its human cost - were published.

The *Scarborough Mercury* printed a London journalist’s view of the raid, in which the tranquil features of the seaside resort are imagined as military targets:

Did the Huns think the bandstand a fortress cupola? Or the Spa sea wall, whose only December tenantry are a drift of wind-born leaves and spray borne sea-weed, a fortress parapet? Was the castle, an antique relic, their symbol of proud England; or Oliver’s Mount, where sheep stray and lovers climb in August evenings, the greatest adventure for the guns of uncivilised vengeance.<sup>56</sup>

The juxtaposition of civilian life with the horrors of war was a recurrent motif of the coverage of the bombardment. The most striking instance of this was the position of women and children as victims. We have discussed in an earlier

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<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 17 December, 1914.

<sup>55</sup> *Brighouse Echo* (hereafter *BE*), 18 December, 1914.

<sup>56</sup> *SM*, 18 December, 1914.

chapter the way in which a model of acceptable male violence was only possible within the sphere of the Front.<sup>57</sup> Violence upon the home front, such as the anti-German riots, was deemed unmanly, with the role of women as protagonists and victims further emphasising this. The worst of the perceived German atrocities in Belgium involved violence against women and children. The sexual nature of the Belgian atrocities was not mirrored in the raids, but the bombings strengthened the brutal image of the German soldier, and by definition, the German character. German views of the naval action were quoted at length in the press. A ‘beflagged’ Berlin was thought to have played host to ‘[i]ndescribable jubilation’ and it was said that the German press ‘exults’ over the revenge for the British victory in the Falklands. Many reports emphasised ‘with pride’ the way the navy ‘greeted British towns, while their inhabitants were asleep’.<sup>58</sup> This coverage of German opinion echoed the disapproving reports of Berlin hysteria at the outbreak of war, sustaining the view of a frenzied warlike national character. This contrasted with the idea that the British treated the war with calm resolve. As we shall see, this helped to rationalise and commend the response to the raid.

It was clear that the bombardment had brought a new dimension to the experience of war on the Home Front. The isolated nature of the bombardment was established and the fears of invasion overcome. The *Northern Daily Mail* was relieved that ‘its over, and let’s hope it won’t occur again. There are 50 other coast towns to be scared besides ours’. The bombardment had been undoubtedly traumatic. ‘[W]hile it lasted, how terrible it was’, recalled the editor. Sympathy for the troops in France turned to empathy:

We now appreciate what a brave soldier wrote from the trenches: “I don’t care who he is, he would be thoroughly unnerved by the sound of these awful shells.” And then they tell you to “keep calm”, but they don’t tell you how to do it.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> See Chapter Five, ‘The Violence of Belonging’.

<sup>58</sup> *NDM*, 18 December, 1914.

<sup>59</sup> *NDM*, 19 December, 1914.

However, there was closer empathy with other civilians who had suffered ‘the realities of war’. The bombing raids were clearly identified with the sufferings of the Belgian people. The hardships visited upon Belgium had become a monument in the British mind to German ‘Kultur’. So often, the rhetoric of recruitment meetings stressed that troops for Kitchener were needed to save Britain from the fate that befell the people of Louvain. Now they themselves had suffered. The editorial of the Scarborough ‘teatime’ paper, on the day of the bombardment, could print no report of the raid. Yet it concluded that ‘[t]oday Scarborough was able to enter into the feelings of the Belgians and others who have seen their homes partly or wholly destroyed’.<sup>60</sup> By Friday it termed the raid ‘a baptism of fire’.<sup>61</sup> The *Leeds Mercury* denounced the Germans, ‘whose policy of “frightfulness” in Belgium finds a maritime application in to-day’s events on our coast’.<sup>62</sup> The Archbishop of York stated that:

[W]e at last had a vision of the realities of war. The hideous spectacle of death and destruction had knocked at our own door, and made us feel a new sense of kinship and sympathy for the members of Christ’s Church at Malines, Louvain and Rheims.<sup>63</sup>

In the press accounts of the raid dwelt upon fleeing women and children, defenceless and semi-clothed. The *Scarborough Mercury* reported:

The plight of women and children was pitiable, little ones huddling against their mothers, who, with what belongings it was possible to gather hastily together, and clasping babes to their breasts made for the nearest road [...]<sup>64</sup>

The fear and upheaval the bombardment caused appeared to be symbolised by the manner in which it transformed everyday appearance and routine. At the time of

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<sup>60</sup> *SM*, 16 December, 1914.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 18 December, 1914.

<sup>62</sup> *LM*, 17 December, 1914.

<sup>63</sup> *NDM*, 18 December, 1914.

<sup>64</sup> *SM*, 18 December, 1914.



the Yarmouth 'sideshow', comment was raised in the press about the 'many fellows shaved and unshorn' watching from a Beach garden terrace.<sup>65</sup> The *Huddersfield Examiner* reported that, during the Scarborough raid, one fleeing family reached the railway station 'with no hats on'.<sup>66</sup> A Hull businessman in Scarborough spoke of how 'terrified women and children were running out of their houses and about the streets in their night attire'.<sup>67</sup> A woman who arrived in Leeds 'was wearing bedroom slippers, and carried a child in her nightdress'.<sup>68</sup> Churchill himself 'jumped out of the bath with exclamations' when he heard the news, and hurried half dressed to the War room.<sup>69</sup> Even the *Times History of the War* saw fit to remember how in Hartlepool 'women in all stages of undress, some barefooted, some in their night clothes' were most notable amongst the throng.<sup>70</sup> The familiarity of these scenes was not lost on observers. One eye-witness from Bradford reported that 'women were walking in the roads barefooted, with only their night attire – a most pitiable sight'. In an attempt to describe the episode better, he told the paper: '[y]ou have seen pictures of Belgian refugees, well, it was just like that'.<sup>71</sup> Another witness said, 'we could realise very much how the poor Belgians have suffered. I did not credit altogether the newspaper accounts of their actions in Belgium, but when it is brought to our own shores [...]'.<sup>72</sup> The language and imagery of Belgian atrocity sat easily with the shock and outrage of the attack on the East Coast.

The image of barbaric German intentions was strongly expressed in political rhetoric. Lord Rosebery, speaking at an Edinburgh Relief Fund Concert on the bombing, articulated a divide between national characters demonstrated by the bombing. In the press there 'was a magnificent roll of honour – a long list of soldiers decorated for feats of valour'. Alongside this list of names was 'a German roll of honour of women and children at Hartlepool'. Likewise in

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<sup>65</sup> *YL*, 7 November, 1914.

<sup>66</sup> *HDE*, 16 December, 1914.

<sup>67</sup> *LM*, 17 December, 1914.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> Churchill, *The World Crisis*, p. 292.

<sup>70</sup> *Times History of the War*, p. 368.

<sup>71</sup> *BDA*, 19 December, 1914.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 22 December, 1914.

Scarborough, there were the names of ‘women and children well and hearty on Wednesday, now standing before the Judgement Seat of God pleading against their destroyer’. In Whitby, Rosebery was pleased that ‘the Germans were not so fortunate to be able to bag a woman’. Referring to Louvain, Rosebery conceded that Whitby Abbey was ‘too tempting a target for any Prussian to resist’.<sup>73</sup> Walter Runciman, M.P. for West Hartlepool, congratulated the ‘heinous polecats’ on the ‘fame of colossal murder’. The spectacle ‘of maimed women and children, to say nothing of the senseless destruction of large blocks of property, brings home the truth of a vast carnival of wickedness’.<sup>74</sup> Winston Churchill’s phrase was naturally the most colourful and, as we shall see below, became the most controversial. Churchill’s message to the Mayor of Scarborough claimed that ‘whatever feats of arms the German Navy may hereafter perform, the stigma of the baby-killers of Scarborough will brand its officers and men while sailors sail the sea’.<sup>75</sup> Churchill’s statement placed the bombardment clearly in the context of Belgian atrocity stories, in which Uhlan lancers allegedly murdered infants.<sup>76</sup>

These sentiments were manifested in the official inquests into the casualties. Held the day after the raids, testimonies at the inquests reinforced the image of war disrupting civilian life, and the role of women and children as victims. It is also valuable to note that the press does not hold back in its gruesome description of wounds. As we discussed at the beginning of this chapter, the influential writings of Owen, Sassoon *et al* spoke of a populace who had little sense of the blood and gore of war. Yet elsewhere we have seen that newspapers thought little of printing accounts of slaughter, in soldiers’ letters or interviews.<sup>77</sup> Thus it is not surprising that the wounds and causes of death are reported without much comment on their horrific nature.

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<sup>73</sup> All Rosebery quotes from *NDM*, 19 December, 1914.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 21 December, 1914.

<sup>76</sup> See Chapter Three, ‘‘Business as Usual’’?

<sup>77</sup> See discussion in Chapter Three, ‘‘Business as Usual’’? I recommend M. Finn, ‘Mythologies of War’, unpublished B.A. dissertation, University of Liverpool, 2001.

At the inquest in West Hartlepool the deputy coroner began his work with a speech. Due to the time elapsed since any English towns had been attacked those present 'had no precedent at all' for their verdicts:

The bombardment had brought home to all of them that they were face to face with the realities of war. They now had some idea what the Belgians and the French had suffered by invasion. He mentioned this – although it had nothing to do with the enquiry – because he thought it might bring it home to their minds what the war really meant.<sup>78</sup>

The causes and prevention of the raid were the business of the Admiralty, and there was little to do but identify the casualties and establish the cause of death. That the raid occurred at breakfast added a sharper distinction between war and the everyday. Wallace Caw related how 'he, his wife, his daughter and his little son were in the back sitting room having breakfast. His daughter was sitting at the fire when a shell burst through the ceiling and killed her instantly'.<sup>79</sup> Other descriptions were more graphic: Alexander Phillips found his son 'lying dead, his body absolutely riddled'; Margaret Hunter had 'gone out to pick sea coal', and her body was found 'riddled with shell' by her son Thomas. Sixteen-year-old Edward Cooper died at the hospital after the raid from shock, his thigh being 'smashed to pulp'. Amongst those still alive, there had been many limbs shattered, and many amputations performed. The inquest carried over to the Friday, where the verdict was announced. The victims had been '[K]illed in time of war by a shell fired from a German warship off the coast of Hartlepool'.<sup>80</sup> The death toll on Friday for West Hartlepool stood at thirty-eight.

Across the bay at Hartlepool, 'the Old Borough was wrapped in mist and gloom' as their inquest began. Throughout the town, 'it was generally expected that the death-rate would be heavy, but few expected that so high a figure would be

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<sup>78</sup> *NDM*, 17 December, 1914.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 18 December, 1914.

reached'.<sup>81</sup> By the close of the day forty had been counted, of whom seven were still to be identified. Those dying from wounds would gradually add to that number. Three followed the next day. Coroner Bell began proceedings by stating that they were there to examine the deaths of 'unarmed civilians – people who were taking no part in warlike operations, but going about their ordinary occupations'. The Germans he termed 'the enemy whose disasters we cannot measure', beyond the official capacity of the inquest. The wounds were no less appalling than in West Hartlepool. A piece of shell weighing three pounds was found in the shoulder of Catherine Marshall, an eighty-six-year old. Nineteen-year-old Freyda Wainwright was found by her stepfather in the mortuary. She had lost an arm, and 'part of her head had been blown off'.<sup>82</sup> Whitby suffered two deaths. Frederick Randall, a coastguard, stepped out of his house and a shell 'blew his head clean off'.<sup>83</sup> William Tunmore was struck by a shell whilst driving his horse and cart. A verdict of 'killed by shells fired by German warships' was returned, and the jury donated their fees to Randall's widow.<sup>84</sup> In Scarborough the Coroner advised that 'the deaths were due to a tragedy caused by the bombardment of a defenceless and unfortified town by an enemy of this country, who was conducting warfare contrary to the rules of all civilised nations'. The raid was 'a form of Kultur which this nation would not feel disposed to imitate'.<sup>85</sup> Seventeen were proclaimed dead in Scarborough.<sup>86</sup>

#### IV – '*Avenge Scarborough*' – *Aftermath*

That the bombardments had been the work of an evil enemy was not in doubt. The horror of the shelling and size of the death toll were confirmed as products of German 'Kultur'. But the question of how the Germans were able to perform the raid suggested that there were failings other than those inherent in Teutonic morality. Since August, there had been a consensus that criticism of the state

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<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 17 December, 1914.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 17 December, 1914.

<sup>83</sup> *SM*, 18 December, 1914.

<sup>84</sup> *NDM*, 18 December, 1914.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> *SM*, 18 December, 1914.

undermined the unity that the challenge of war provided.<sup>87</sup> Leaders such as Asquith, and particularly Grey, appeared to shed the trappings of party at the dispatch box, and speak for the nation. Even the Defence of the Realm Acts, antithetical to pre-war sensibilities, were seen as necessities in the 'brotherhood of purpose' that the conflict demanded. The conduct of the army in France, and the leadership of Kitchener were thought beyond reproach; the navy perhaps more so. Churchill's role in the Antwerp debacle could even be interpreted as an individual *gaffe*. The East Coast bombings were the first serious affront to the conduct of the armed forces. In raising the stakes of a war that no longer seemed set to stay in Brooke's 'foreign field', the raid raised questions of naval policy and henceforth state policy on the conduct of the war.

Faith in British naval superiority was devout throughout the Edwardian period. Even the agitation over 'we want eight and we won't wait' was the demand to maintain that vast superiority over growing, but still inferior, rivals. Upon the outbreak of war the perceived dominance of the navy in the North Sea was widely acknowledged, sometimes to detrimental effect. A recruitment meeting in Huddersfield, for example, warned against the teachings of the 'blue water school', which argued that as long as the navy ruled the sea, the British were not fighting for the safety of their own homes.<sup>88</sup> Nor was this popular view officially challenged. Marder reasons that discontent after the raid sprang from the fact that '[t]he Admiralty had, after all, led the public to believe that the German fleet would not dare to venture beyond [*Heligoland*] Bight'.<sup>89</sup>

Yet the choice of targets, whilst in one way an obvious example of Teutonic brutality, brought into question this superiority. How 'open' was a town to be if the British commanded the North Sea? Whitby was clearly 'open', whilst Scarborough at that point harboured only troops. The Hartlepoons were classed as defended yet their defences had clearly proved inadequate. Because of this, indignation against the navy was most evident in the 'fortified' town. Samuel

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<sup>87</sup> See Chapter 7, 'All were for the state'.

<sup>88</sup> *Huddersfield Examiner*, 28 August, 1914.

<sup>89</sup> Marder, *From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow*, p. 147.

Storey, writing on the day of the bombardment, hoped that 'our fleet will be able to give a good account of these marauders who, in defiance of public decency, bombarded open towns'.<sup>90</sup> But Storey became an increasingly defiant voice against the admiralty. Three days after the raid he offered two 'burning questions' from the North East:

(1) Are we to contemplate further chance bombardments during the winter, without sufficient defence, from an enemy whose methods I compare with those of a nasty little dog which bites you in the calf and then bolts to escape the inevitable kick? (2) Where were our submarines between 6 and 8 o'clock, just before and when the morning broke on December 16th 1914?<sup>91</sup>

Others asked the same questions. Doubtless the opinions of the London press that 'in these history making days the bombardment ranks from the military point of view as an affair of minor significance' further angered those on the East Coast.<sup>92</sup> Walter Runciman, after his bellicose treatment of the Germans, asked:

Were we caught napping? Publishing the fantastic phrase so often repeated, "It has no military significance"; "Developments are going on"; "they fled, lost in the mist" is of no consolation to those who have been bereaved, not to those who crowd the hospitals, nor is it quite a sailorly way of disposing of an ugly incident that required resource, instinct and action.<sup>93</sup>

Whilst reservations about government decisions had been voiced, these comments intimated doubts over Britain's most trusted arm of defence.

Churchill, his reputation already tarnished after the Antwerp debacle, became the focus of much of the criticism. His eloquent oratory, concentrating national

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<sup>90</sup> *NDM*, 16 December, 1914.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 19 December, 1914

<sup>92</sup> *The Times*, 18 December, 1914.

sympathy on Scarborough, was received with particular chagrin in the Hartlepoons, whose loss was significantly more. Not only was Churchill's omission regrettable, but it cemented the Hartlepoons' status as a lawful war target, despite the paucity of its defence. The *Northern Daily Mail* commented that '[w]e are not going to whine at any of the hard knocks which the fortune of war brings us, but we have surely a right to ask that if the Hartlepoons are to be treated as a fortified place the defences should be more adequate to the work which is expected of them'.<sup>94</sup> Assurances from Churchill that the raid would not disrupt naval policy caused further indignation. Storey's disgust at Churchill's comment that the bombardments were 'one of the most instructive and encouraging that have happened' is palpable:

There must be wiser members of the Government who can induce the First Lord to cease from spending his time in polishing ornate sentences and employ all of it in polishing off the Germans. Mr. Churchill challenged the German ships to come out of their holes or he would dig them out. They have come out, and he says this is very satisfactory and should confirm us in our course.<sup>95</sup>

Churchill writing in the 1920s, accepted the frustration, excusing the supposed apathy by remembering the need for military discretion:

What was the Admiralty doing? Were they all asleep? [...] However, we could not say a word in explanation. We had to bear in silence the censures of our countrymen. We could never admit for fear of compromising our secret information where our squadrons were or how near the German raiding cruisers had been to their destruction.<sup>96</sup>

The First Lord of the Admiralty would face further criticism as the war progressed.

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<sup>93</sup> *NDM*, 19 December, 1914.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 21 December, 1914.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

For the Hartlepoons, dissent was justified. Yet what were the positive conclusions that could be drawn? The Hartlepoons at least had profited from the war, as a centre of heavy industry and shipbuilding. On the eve of the raid the town 'spoke in every street of prosperous industry'.<sup>97</sup> What of Scarborough? The war had disrupted the summer season, and the Christmas holidays were anticipated as redressing at least some of the deficit.

Already the most famous of the three towns bombarded, Scarborough's celebrity as the victims of the raid was sealed by Churchill's proclamation.<sup>98</sup> Its favoured status as a resort that many had visited added an element of recognition to its misfortune that the Hartlepoons lacked. And of course it had new tourist attractions. As we have seen, the town was full of sightseers curious to see the damage in the days following the raid. The *Leeds Mercury* reported 'visitors had come in hundreds by train to view the damage'. Particularly popular were souvenirs of the bombardment, and 'there was great eagerness among them to obtain possession of a piece of shell, and the weighty little relics were exhibited with pride'.<sup>99</sup> In London, the window of the Scarborough Corporation's Advertising Bureau in the Strand displayed the latest news from the town. The London correspondent of *Scarborough Mercury* had previously remarked on the metropolitan demand for 'excursions to the battlefields of the continent'; after the raid, 'our seekers after sensation need not go so far afield now'.<sup>100</sup>

The hope of 'seekers after sensation' salvaging Scarborough's tourist trade was a little premature. Within two weeks an estimated six thousand were thought to have left the town.<sup>101</sup> One account we do possess of a tourist trip to Scarborough in the aftermath of the raid is that of Sylvia Pankhurst, who arrived there on

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<sup>96</sup> Churchill, *The World Crisis*, pp. 302-3.

<sup>97</sup> *The Times History of the War*, Vol. II, p. 363.

<sup>98</sup> See discussion of recruiting below. Even Marder's sub chapter is entitled 'The Scarborough Raid'.

<sup>99</sup> *LM*, 18 December, 1914.

<sup>100</sup> *SM*, 18 December, 1914.

<sup>101</sup> *Times History of the War*, p. 382.

<sup>102</sup> All following quotations from Pankhurst, *The Home Front*, pp. 114-118.



Christmas Eve 1914. Pankhurst viewed the national outrage at the raids as hyperbole, ignoring the wider issues and motives of the conflict. In Pankhurst's memoir, Scarborough represents a grim riposte to the metropolitan swarm of activity. Her party arrived 'in a cheerless dawn. The sky and sea were a leaden grey. The big amusement "palaces" were scarred and battered by shell-fire'.<sup>102</sup> The populace was 'weary and dishevelled'. The spectacle of civilian boats in minesweeping operations, and the heavy casualties involved were heard 'with shocked surprise'. The London press had only seen fit to report on the raid, rather than the risks taken by East Coast fishermen almost daily since August. One ship went down as Pankhurst lodged overnight. She recalls how a 'bent old crone ran by us wailing: "He was a young man with black hair; his head was all smashed in!"' The trauma of the raid loomed large. Pankhurst recalls one resident's account of the raid:

[...] it was terrible, the noise so loud, so fearfully loud, she thought she must go mad. Little children were killed; many people were injured; [...] No one knew when it might happen again; people could not settle down to ordinary life; all sense of security was destroyed.

Another witness said that most had prepared 'a bundle made up in readiness for flight', and that few slept soundly. After the distress of another shipwreck, Pankhurst fled back to London: 'Scarborough was too sad for me.'

If tourism would not benefit from the raid, then surely the galvanising effect of suffering would yield some reward? In all three towns, the conduct of those who were under fire was presented as exemplary. Lord Durham had congratulated the troops on their 'baptism of fire' in resisting the Hartlepool bombardment: 'Nothing different was expected from Durham men.'<sup>103</sup> The hometowns of the garrisoned troops in Scarborough were quick to praise their demeanour in the raid. A sergeant wrote home relating how the Bradford recruits reacted.

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<sup>103</sup> *NDM*, 19 December, 1914.

Marching through the town as the shells began to strike and panic spread, Sgt. Bridgen was not disappointed in his charges:

What pleased me was the way the soldiers took it. I have had some experience of soldiers when under fire and otherwise, but I never saw a lot cooler than those lot in Kitchener's army. I was proud to be in charge of such a lot. They never broke rank, but just went marching along as though nothing had happened, singing [ *'It's a long way to'* 'Tipperary'.<sup>104</sup>

Not all civilian onlookers shared that respect. Pankhurst remembered one of the fishermen from Scarborough who, fearing invasion, looked around for their own soldiers in vain. 'After the bombardment ceased they got into their trenches and sang a hymn' he said with disgust.<sup>105</sup> Stories of civilian pluck and courage echoed through the local press and around the country. *The Times History of the War* included the following story in its account of the raid:

Scarborough people still recall with pride how, when the bombardment began, morning communion was being held at St. Martin's Church on South Cliff. A shell passed through the tower and damaged part of the roof. The congregation showed some concern, but Archdeacon Mackarness told them that they were as safe in church as anywhere else, and he quietly carried through the service to the end.<sup>106</sup>

Another anecdote told of an old Tory labourer who stood at his gate as the shells rained down, claiming that such a crisis would never had happened under Conservative rule.<sup>107</sup> The *Leeds Mercury* wrote of the 'Scarborough Quaker of the bulldog breed', who ran out to face the ships with his rifle.<sup>108</sup> Local charity networks began to work immediately to provide relief, and even shell fragments

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<sup>104</sup> BDA, 17 December, 1914.

<sup>105</sup> Pankhurst, *The Home Front*, p. 117.

<sup>106</sup> *Times History of the War*, vol. II, p. 381.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>108</sup> LM, 18 December, 1914.

were auctioned to raise funds.<sup>109</sup> The slogan 'Business as Usual' was displayed in many shops, and it was reported with pride that public houses and cinemas were open the same night as the raid.<sup>110</sup> These stories - some true, some becoming more apocryphal upon each retelling - reflected the same need for community narratives that can be seen in accounts of August 1914. The image of calm, sturdy resilience to the raid persisted through all the local coverage. Contrast with reports of hysterical German celebrations made this image even more pertinent to the self-perception of the communities at war.

With many civilians having felt 'the real lash of war', in Churchill's words, the bombardment was a significant boost to those involved in the war effort.<sup>111</sup> In Leeds, on the day of the bombardment, the press remarked that some 'regard the visit of the enemy, as a possible blessing in disguise'.<sup>112</sup> For all citizens, the raid would further cement the unity of purpose engendered by the outbreak of war. The Archbishop of York, preaching at a Scarborough service, confirmed that the East Coast casualties would ultimately strengthen the nation's conviction:

Their death will have been a fresh vindication of the righteousness of our cause. It brings to us in this country at a time when, perhaps, we have some need of it, a quick, vivid sense of the dread realities of war, in order that they should prepare us to steal our hearts for the inevitable sacrifices which a great war demands.<sup>113</sup>

The Lord Mayor of Leeds 'thought it might have the effect of knitting together all the units and all the individuals in the city and in the country'.<sup>114</sup> None could now dismiss the war as conflict distinct from British shores.

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<sup>109</sup> *NDM*, 22 December, 1914.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid*, 17 December, 1914 and *Times History of the War*, vol. II, p. 381.

<sup>111</sup> *The World Crisis*, p. 303.

<sup>112</sup> *LM*, 17 December, 1914.

<sup>113</sup> *BDA*, 21 December, 1914

<sup>114</sup> *LM*, 17 December, 1914.

Many clearly hoped that the main impact would be felt in those young men still to enlist. Recalling that the peak of recruiting followed the crisis at Mons, the national press looked for another boom:

A chart shows that the indicator falls low when the campaign is going smoothly and well, and shoots high on days following checks on land or disasters at sea. The lesson of the raid that the shores of England are not unviolable has sent to the colours of thousand young men who hitherto were doubting whether their services were really needed.<sup>115</sup>

Even before the 16 December, a Leeds recruiting officer had stated that '[i]t would do us all the good in the world if there was a Zeppelin raid or an invasion of Yorkshire'.<sup>116</sup> *The Times* claimed that 'soldiers rejoice that Germany carries the war into England, for it is only on these terms that our people can be thoroughly aroused'.<sup>117</sup> Within days a recruitment poster was published bearing the legend 'AVENGE SCARBOROUGH - UP AND AT THEM NOW'.<sup>118</sup> The accompanying text, in keeping with established recruitment rhetoric, appealed to men to protect innocents from the barbarity of German 'Kultur'. Prospective recruits were told that the 'innocent victims of German brutality call upon you to avenge them'.<sup>119</sup> The gruesome 'violation' of Belgium promised for these shores by the platform orator had already begun. In the words of *The Times*, 'the agricultural labourer of the East Riding and the industrial worker of the North Riding have had the horrors of war brought to their doors and recruiting is certain to be accelerated as a result'.<sup>120</sup> The response was more equivocal than the appeal demanded. The London correspondent of the *Bradford Daily Argus* reported that the bombardment caused a 'striking impetus to recruiting' on the day following the raid.<sup>121</sup> Reflecting a growing nostalgia already for the heady days of August, *The Times* compared the recent rush to '[s]ome of the exciting

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<sup>115</sup> *The Times*, 18 December, 1914.

<sup>116</sup> *LM*, 17 December, 1914.

<sup>117</sup> *The Times*, 17 December, 1914.

<sup>118</sup> *SM*, 19 December, 1914.

<sup>119</sup> *LM*, 19 December, 1914.

<sup>120</sup> *The Times*, 18 December, 1914.

<sup>121</sup> *BDA*, 17 December, 1914.

scenes of the earlier stages of the war'.<sup>122</sup> The Hartlepoons, whose record in recruiting before the raid had been excellent, continued to provide a stream of men.<sup>123</sup> In Scarborough the increase in recruiting was less pronounced, perhaps more a reflection of the age demographic of the resort.<sup>124</sup> Yet across Yorkshire the anticipated rush did not occur. The *Leeds Mercury* claimed on 19 December that the new initiative 'does not appear to have had the slightest effect, and recruiting was, if anything, below the previous Friday's figures'.<sup>125</sup> After the weekend the paper confessed that numbers 'were again somewhat disappointing, especially in view of the recent naval raid'.<sup>126</sup> One local notable, Col. Thorold, claimed that the week of the raid had been the worst in recruiting terms since the outbreak of war.<sup>127</sup> This fact was blamed on the fact that men were 'holding back until after Christmastide'.<sup>128</sup> The recruiting officer in Brighouse likewise reported that he had received 'many promises' for enlistment in the New Year.<sup>129</sup>

#### V – North and South

The bombardment brought up questions of regional difference in the experience of war, particularly between London and the north. Even enlightened Londoners such as Pankhurst were distressed at the contrast between Scarborough and the capital. The Hartlepoons were unimpressed by the London coverage of the 'Scarborough raid', and the seeming inactivity of the admiralty. Simultaneously the London press viewed the north, particularly east of the Pennines, as requiring a reminder to the import of the situation. *The Times* was obviously answering widespread criticism when it explained that 'some of the most patriotic in Yorkshire to-day are those who remain at their place in the engineering shop and

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<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>123</sup> *Times History of the War*, vol. II, p. 378. 'It was their boast that it had given more recruits to then new Armies than any place of the size in the country.'

<sup>124</sup> 'By the eve of the First World War the seaside resorts had acquired a distinctive population profile, coupled with a remarkable combination of low birth-rates and low death-rates.' J. K. Walton, *The English Seaside Resort: a social history 1750-1914* (New York, 1983), p. 100.

<sup>125</sup> *LM*, 19 December, 1914.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 21 December, 1914.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>129</sup> *BE*, 24 December, 1914.

the mill'.<sup>130</sup> Whilst the unfairness of comparison with the depressed cotton trade of Lancashire was also noted in its defence, the manifestation of Yorkshire patriotism was cause for concern. Recruits were required through official channels, men for the front in France. The fear persisted that vigilante forces were being organised in Yorkshire, stemming the tide of new soldiers into the army. Anti-German riots in Sunderland on 19 December, motivated in part by the raids, suggested that many were happy to take violence into their own hands.<sup>131</sup> Growing invasion fears were thought to be encouraging men to stay, reminiscent of the early recruiting rush for home defence only. The threats of Belgian atrocities on British soil had worked too well. The *Leeds Mercury* published a detailed plan of German invasion. The German army would land on the East Coast and, marching across the West Riding and into Lancashire, with 'all mills and business places to be demolished immediately, the millions of people in the district turned out'.<sup>132</sup> With these rumours current, it was little surprise that unofficial preparations for home defence became a concern for the military authorities. This reflected the aversion to the uncontrolled patriotism that undermined the calm, unified war effort. In Brighouse for example, there were reservations about the popularity of local 'volunteer guard' clubs, and their impact on the army.<sup>133</sup> As the *Manchester Guardian* remembered, the anxiety over vigilante forces 'lay in the real danger that in the case of a landing patriotic civilians outside the trained forces of the Crown, might, by unauthorised acts of hostility, bring down punishment on their fellow-citizens.'<sup>134</sup> In Belgium the consequences of resistance had been well documented. Most in command wished to see the divide between civilian and combatant strictly enforced.

What was the impact of the raids on the East Coast? Without doubt the 'realities of war' had been visited upon British shores. Descriptions of wounds, and the destructive power of shellfire, can only have fostered empathy for the troops in France in an oblivious public. Yet this understanding can be countered in two

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<sup>130</sup> *The Times*, 18 December, 1914.

<sup>131</sup> *Sunderland Daily Echo*, 21 December, 1914. See Chapter Five, 'The Violence of Belonging'.

<sup>132</sup> *LM*, 22 December, 1914.

<sup>133</sup> *BE*, 22 January, 1915.

contrasting ways. The regional diversity of the home front meant that some areas were affected by the war more directly than others. The East Coast fishing communities had been suffering casualties since the war began, an experience other towns could obviously not share. But despite that, we can see that the reaction to the raids shows that the divide between civilian and combatant was not as large as our mythology would have us believe. Gruesome wounds and the fear of shelling had been a fixture of war descriptions in every local newspaper since Mons. The bombardments were a shock, but the only difference – outside the shelled towns – is that the images of slaughter in the press were for the first time applied to British civilians. As a motive for recruitment, the raid provided a slight spur to those considering enlistment. The heights of August and September would never again be reached.

The raids also affected perceptions of the Germans. For many it confirmed the atrocity rumours emanating from Belgium. An aspect of the divide between the trenches and home that did persist was the hatred fostered towards the enemy. One of the reasons that the Christmas truce at the front seemed so surprising in Britain was the manner in which it followed so closely after the events of 16 December.<sup>135</sup> There was little charity or fraternity expected from either side. The raid, above all, had defined the Germans as purely evil. Similarly, Teutonic hatred of England was thought to exceed the British animosity. ‘We do not hate the Germans as they hate us’, said one churchman, ‘but I should think within the last few days we have been nearer to it than we ever were before.’<sup>136</sup>

In terms of human cost, the East Coast bombardments were the most costly raid on British civilians in the war. But rather than marking the beginning of a German naval campaign, it remained virtually unique. The fears of further raids and invasions were unrealised. The German army, digging in both fronts, had neither the men nor the resources for an invasion. The naval tactics of both nations

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<sup>134</sup> *Manchester Guardian History of the War* (Manchester, 1915) Vol. I, p. 175.

<sup>135</sup> M. Brown & S. Seaton, *Christmas Truce: The western front 1914* (London, 1984), p. 47.

<sup>136</sup> *NDM*, 21 December, 1914.

developed into a blockade aimed at supply ships rather than coastal ports. As 1915 progressed, fearful civilians began to look to the skies rather than the seas.

## VI – *Zeppelins*

Civilian experience of the ‘realities of war’ became, from 1915 onwards, centred on attack from the air. In the chronology of this study, the Zeppelin threat emerges in early 1915. None of the individual Zeppelin sorties ever matched in intensity the forty-five minute shell storm of 16 December, but the cumulative effect was greater, the threat persisting until the close of war. This section details the effect of two of the earliest Zeppelin raids, and in the analysis we shall see continuity with the reception of the East Coast bombardments. We can see again the need for the community to stress its defiance and the unflinching description of the casualties. We can again hear questions asked of government policy. To accommodate the more individual impressions of eyewitnesses it is sometimes necessary to stretch beyond the summer of 1915.

The threat of Zeppelins had made its impact before the first airship rumbled out of the clouds above East Anglia in 1915. London had been on alert, the precautions transforming the appearance of the thriving city. On 1 October illuminated street signs and shop windows were obscured; by December further precautions were ordered, with street lamps covered in black paint.<sup>137</sup> Mary Coules ‘dreaded going home to Acton’ in the autumn of 1914:

[...] for we had heard that London was so depressing & sad. All the lights were lowered, the streets practically dark, for fear of Zeppelins. I shall never forget the first time I ever saw the stars above Piccadilly; ordinarily the lights are so bright that it is impossible.<sup>138</sup>

F. A. Robinson remarked in his diary in early October on ‘the curious sight to see the sky swept by searchlights mounted on the top of Charing Cross Station’. The

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<sup>137</sup> *The Times*, 1 October, 1914; *The Home Front*, p. 191f.



whole effect was ‘very weird’, transforming the metropolitan landscape. The war had come to the street corners of Mayfair and Bloomsbury. By early January Robinson noted how the rumours of three Zeppelins over Calais meant that ‘they are coming uncomfortably near’.<sup>139</sup> The lights were also dimmed in the rural counties of the south-east, not always a popular measure. The Rev. Andrew Clark, a keen volunteer for village defence, complained that some residents of Leighs in Essex ‘were most unreasonable about the no-lights order’. One lady refused to darken her windows, ‘on the plea that she is “not afraid of Zeppelins”’.<sup>140</sup>

East Anglia again became the first victim of a German attack. Comparison, much of it unfavourable, was made at Scarborough between the German raiders and the exploits on the East Coast of Paul Jones, an eighteenth-century pirate.<sup>141</sup> Raids from the sea, though rare in recent history, had been occurring since the Romans. Yet attack from the air was a new fear, a twentieth-century technique of making war. Many, though afraid, did not hide their fascination with the new machines and much comment by the press and eye-witnesses describes with excitement and awe the effect of the bombardments. It was mid-January when the attack occurred, an airship making a speculative raid over several East Anglian villages.

Due to the blackout at Kings Lynn, the sound of the engines was all that could be heard.<sup>142</sup> It was around half past eight in the evening when the Zeppelin, ‘making a terrific noise’, passed over nearby Sheringham.<sup>143</sup> A eye-witness account from the village was published in the *Daily Mail*, and reproduced in the *Yarmouth Independent*:

It was a wonderful and awe inspiring spectacle. The Zeppelin, like a great cigar, lay dim and dark against the darkness of the sky, The Zeppelin was

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<sup>138</sup> Mary Coules, unpublished notebook, IWM, 97/25/1.

<sup>139</sup> F.A. Robinson, diary entry for 3 January, 1915, IWM.

<sup>140</sup> *Echoes of the Great War*, p. 47.

<sup>141</sup> *SM*, 17 December 1914.

<sup>142</sup> *YI*, 23 January, 1915.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*

fitted with searchlights, which now and again were flashed below, casting a weird ray of light on the dark town and the countryside.<sup>144</sup>

Whilst the darkness might have obscured the sight of the Zeppelin, the effect of the bombs was more evident. The explosives blew craters in the ground eight feet wide and four feet deep, and 'several concussions literally shook the town'.<sup>145</sup> As the bombardment in the village of Gorleston subsided, 'excited knots of people stood in groups all over the town [...] eager to discuss the event with anyone who was willing to do the same'.<sup>146</sup> Discussions and rumours suggested that a further visit was expected in the next hour, and several 'distinctly heard' the engines again after midnight.

When the excitement subsided, two casualties were found amongst the wreckage. As in the December bombardments, no detail of the wounds were spared a public already familiar with such accounts from the East Coast or the battlefield. A local reservist, Sergeant Henry Cox, discovered the body of Samuel Smith:

He was lying with his feet a very few inches from the door way of his premises leading to the road and his head lying well towards his own shop door, which is in the yard. In my own mind I was quite satisfied he was dead. There was a great pool of blood against the head and another against the body.<sup>147</sup>

Dr Raymond Shaw confirmed the decapitation of the first victim, and gave a graphic description of the wounds that killed Smith's mother-in-law, found lying several yards away. The coroner concluded that 'the unfortunate man and woman were victims of so-called warfare – but he did not call it so. He called it an offspring of German culture'. Beyond the established rhetoric on Teutonic

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<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*

brutality, the coroner conceded that the attack 'did not compete with that of Scarborough' and Hartlepool'.<sup>148</sup>

A single Zeppelin raid was never going to be as cataclysmic as that hour of shelling of 16 December. In the event this made it easier to translate the experience of the raid into the community's war narrative. The East Anglians had been solid since the outbreak of war; their response to the raid simply confirmed this. The *Yarmouth Independent* commented on how '[p]eople in Gorleston remained very calm during the Raid, There were cries in certain quarters and a few shouts from Priory Street, but on the whole Gorleston acquitted itself well'.<sup>149</sup> Humorous stories and myths about the raid quickly surfaced, with women the typical butt of the jokes. The *Independent* wrote of a woman who 'rushed out of her house and simply collared every man in sight'. Other women 'threw their arms around the neck of the nearest male'. One woman, fuelled by 'something stronger than *aquae purae*' lost her way home and sighted six Zeppelins. Not all the jokes were on women. One old man claimed 'that a Zeppelin passed him so close he could have brought it down with a walking stick', yet as the paper concluded with mock solemnity, '[u]nfortunately he did not have a stick that night'.<sup>150</sup> Typically the weeks following the raid were rife with rumours and scares. A man reportedly found signalling in Gorleston was thought to have been shot on the spot; a visitor from Norwich was allegedly arrested and released without an apology.<sup>151</sup> F.A. Robinson reported that there was 'no doubt from the reports of several eye-witnesses that the German airships [...] were guided by a motor car with very strong head-lights'. The car was meant to lead the intruders to the royal family at Sandringham.<sup>152</sup> The alarm of women was a resource of humour for those reporting the region's disquiet. The women's column of the *Independent* published the poem 'Wait and See', advising:

Be Calm when the clouds roll by, lassie,

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<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 30 January, 1915.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 6 February, 1915.

<sup>152</sup> F.A. Robinson, diary entry for 23 January, 1915, IWM.

Don't screech, when the clouds roll by,  
They're really clouds and not Zeps, lassie  
Don't quake when the clouds roll by.<sup>153</sup>

Whilst some may have fled in terror from the East Anglian poets, more serious accounts of fear in the Zeppelin raid was also reported. William Blake was with Samuel Smith when the bomb fell. After a 'blinding flash', Blake came to:

I was terribly frightened and dazed and I had a sickly feeling come over me. I did not know where I was, but I remember crying out 'oh' – and then all my breath seemed to leave me and there was darkness. It was a terrible occurrence.

Blake was clearly shattered by what happened:

I have had one of the worst experiences of my life. I could never have anything worse except death. I never want to go such a time again. It has completely upset me and made my nerves go completely and I still feel the effects and am likely to do for some time.<sup>154</sup>

The experience of the first Zeppelin raid mirrors the December bombings in miniature. We can identify the mixture of exhilaration and panic during the raid and the frank descriptions of the wounds suffered. We can see how the uncertainty after the bombardment led to a proliferation of myths and stories about the raid. These sought explanations in rumours of espionage, and found comfort in the humour and resolve of the community. And lastly, we can sense the experience of war which, though isolated and less sustained than that of the soldier, was certainly not too distant to merit the divide of our myth narrative.

By mid-1915, the Zeppelin raids had become common occurrences in the south-east, but lost none of their fascination. On 10 May 1915, the steam hooter

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<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*

alerted Southend-on-Sea to the approaching airships. Instead of staying indoors, 'thousands came out, some with overcoats over their night attire, to get a sight of the aircraft'.<sup>155</sup> Typically, the press reported that 'there was no trace whatever of panic among the thousands of the inhabitants, who were soon flocking into the streets, and the last place which anybody thought of visiting appeared to be the cellars.'<sup>156</sup> Between one and four Zeppelins were involved in the raid, with an estimated £20,000 worth of damage. The town suffered only one death. As the local press noted, 'few Southenders imagined over one hundred bombs could be dropped in a populous district with so little effect'.

The image of Zeppelin raids, of mysterious aircraft looming out of the clouds to bomb civilians, further emphasised the brutality of Britain's foes. The Zeppelin raids were held to 'prove beyond question' the 'indescribable deeds of brutality and bestiality'<sup>157</sup> recently discussed in the Bryce report. Recruitment rhetoric had always stressed that the Britain would suffer the fate of Belgium if the army did not halt their advance in France. Now Southend-on-Sea was the latest victim of the cruelty:

The manifold crimes of the Huns had not previously impressed them with any degree of personal force. Perhaps in some cases there was a certain lurking feeling that newspaper accounts were exaggerated. But personal knowledge and experience of "frightfulness" at Southend leave no room for doubt.<sup>158</sup>

Yet, as Belgium had heroically responded to the challenge, so would the offended community. The raid was expected to persuade those young men who had not yet enlisted to take up the King's shilling. The rest of the town was barely shaken. The local *Observer* claimed that 'if the Homicidal Lunatic of Berlin and his officers who ordered the air raid on Southend knew how entirely absent was

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<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>155</sup> *Essex County Chronicle*, 14 May, 1915.

<sup>156</sup> *Southend-on-Sea Observer*, 12 May, 1915.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 19 May, 1915.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*

anything approaching panic they would gnash their teeth'.<sup>159</sup> Beyond the conventional press picture of a calmly defiant town, some were preparing to leave. There were town council debates over the suitability of the steam hooter alert for Zeppelin raids. Other hooters and whistles in the town were creating false alarms, and the ladies of the town, among others, were 'getting nervy'.<sup>160</sup> Criticism of the government, and in particular Churchill, was never far from the surface. Tradesmen felt that the position of Southend, 'at the mouth of the Thames, leading to the capital of the Empire' warranted more protection.<sup>161</sup> One editorial summed up the prevailing attitude:

The enemy is getting more persistent in his attacks upon this country from the air in Zeppelins, and people are not unnaturally beginning to ask when the promised hornet's nest – vide Mr Winston Churchill in the House of Commons some months ago – is going to be provided for them to bring them down.<sup>162</sup>

An immediate rejoinder to this question followed, with the writer emphasising the absence of 'any panic, or any reason for panic, but the Britisher likes to see something doing, and always to give a satisfactory answer when he is attacked'.<sup>163</sup>

Outside of the press columns, the community found other ways to express its own response to the raid. The centrepiece was the funeral of Agnes Whitwell, the raid's only casualty, on Saturday 15 May. A Salvation Army member, Whitwell's funeral was accompanied by a military pageantry in keeping with the manner of her death. Her coffin was covered in a Salvation Army flag, flanked by uniformed men in white armlets, and ladies in white sashes. In addition to her brethren, 'enormous crowds watched the progress of the cortege through the streets', and several hundred were present at the cemetery.<sup>164</sup> The names of those present were listed in the press, a witness to communal mourning. The identification of

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<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 12 May, 1915.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 19 May, 1915.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>162</sup> *Essex County Chronicle*, 14 May, 1915.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*

Whitwell as a 'war' casualty was reflected in her memorial service the following day, which was also dedicated to the death of a local soldier in France.<sup>165</sup> There were less dignified reactions to the Zeppelin raid. A public meeting to discuss the further internment of aliens became the catalyst for an anti-German riot, where one of the rioters claimed in his defence that he was reacting to his own house being bombed.<sup>166</sup> The raids on the south-east persisted. The Whitsuntide holidays saw half the number of visitors to Southend as in 1914. The safety of the town was further questioned when a raid on the night 26 May caused two more deaths, one of them from a retaliatory British shell. The press with longing at '[w]hat a grand advertisement it would have been if a Zeppelin had been brought down'.<sup>167</sup> Some profited from the raids; shell 'Relics' of the Zeppelin raids became coveted attraction of the local museum.<sup>168</sup> As in the December bombardment such items were valued prizes. The first shell to drop on English soil had raised £20 for twenty pounds to the Red Cross.<sup>169</sup> A more opportunistic local trader ran an advert for 'Kyl-Fire' fire extinguishers at 5/6 each. The slogan appeared alongside the newspaper raid reports, noting that during the recent bombardment 'there were more fires than FIRE ENGINES'.<sup>170</sup>

The first raid on London occurred on 30 May, 1915, with the loss of four lives. *The Times* wrote that the 'principal object' of the raids was 'thoroughly German', reflecting 'the wish to kill as many people and destroy as much property as they possibly can'.<sup>171</sup> Pankhurst's memories of the raids are inevitably placed in the context of her overall war critique, yet her memory is vivid enough, the sound of the 'ominous grinding' and the rattle of shrapnel on the roof. Some were more fearful than others. Pankhurst's memoir claims she was 'detached from it all [...] for our household I had no least shade of apprehension – a for myself Life had no

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<sup>164</sup> *Southend-on-Sea Observer*, 19 May, 1915.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>166</sup> See Chapter Five, 'The Violence of Belonging'.

<sup>167</sup> *Southend-on-Sea Observer*, 2 June, 1915. The first German Zeppelin shot down was over Ghent in June 1915. The first over Britain did not occur until September 1916.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, 26 May, 1915 and 2 June, 1915.

<sup>169</sup> F.A. Robinson, diary entry for 6 January, 1915, IWM.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, 19 May, 1915.

<sup>171</sup> *The Times*, 2 June, 1915.

great claim.<sup>172</sup> One of her companions had to be ordered down from the roof, where she was watching the explosions. Mary Coules shared the same curiosity, recounting a London Zeppelin raid from September 1915. The ‘steady boom’ of the bombs over the city alerted Coules and her brother, and they watched from their window in Acton:

True enough, there were bight flashes all over the sky, & sharp bangs whenever a shell burst. We watched them chase the Zeppelin from the West to the North West, shells bursting all around it – Unfortunately we couldn’t see the shape of the Zeppelin, because they make a cloud for themselves – but we could see exactly where it was.<sup>173</sup>

Whilst only lasting fifteen minutes, ‘it was thrilling’ for Mary and undoubtedly for many others. Pankhurst remembers ‘[s]warms of children’ prizing shrapnel that had been embedded in the road, and the arrival of ‘unaccustomed visitors’ to view the damage in the East End. For Pankhurst it was an almost comic episode:

Impatient passengers on the top of ‘buses were asking before they had yet passed Bishopsgate: “Is this the East End?” [...] What sights for the pretty ladies in dainty dresses, craning their slender white throats from taxicab windows! What sights for the rather too generously fed business men and well-groomed officers: miserable dwellings, far from fit for human families [...] sadder even these than the havoc wrought by German bombs!<sup>174</sup>

Mary Coules visited the bombed areas, stating that ‘it isn’t really very extensive’, though wooden barriers blocked off the more severe damage. The fascination with shell fragments continued. Coules had a ring made from a German shell that had fallen on Paris, and was ‘pleased with my aluminum made in Germany, brought down in France, & sent to England. Shrapnel became a more readily available souvenir as the raids persisted.

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<sup>172</sup> Pankhurst, *The Home Front*, p.191.

<sup>173</sup> Coules, IWM, 97/25/1.

<sup>174</sup> *The Home Front*, p.193.



Despite the obvious excitement, the strain also began to tell. Pankhurst remembered how, during the blacked out nights, 'a lighted cigarette-end was enough at times to gain a man a blow'.<sup>175</sup> Retaliatory riots were common in the East End, in Pankhurst's view fuelled by hunger and rife with looting.<sup>176</sup> Out in rural Hornchurch in Essex, Mrs. Purbrook wrote in 1918 on the cumulative effects of the bombings.

Glorious moonlit nights will ever be associated in my mind with these terrible experiences [...] gun-fire, shell-fire, little spurts of flame, search-lights, bombs dropping, shells screeching. It is devilish, damnable. But language is altogether inadequate to express the wickedness of it all.<sup>177</sup>

The difference in experience for those outside of the Zeppelin range and targets was extreme. Purbrook and her husband took a holiday to the South-West in 1917, 'away from the air raids which are so nerve racking'. Ilfracombe in Devon 'we found beautiful and not depressed by war-clouds. There is no constant noise of guns and scare of air-warfare'.<sup>178</sup> Her account of a 1918 holiday in Kent demonstrated the extent to which the Great War affected the lives of civilians:

As Ramsgate was in the bombing area we found the necessary accommodation easily. I can't say it was cheerful or uplifting. There were rows of empty houses, many with all the windows missing, burst by the concussion of bombing explosions. Constantly one came across houses completely wrecked; there would be great gaps in the road. [...] Altogether the people had a very bad time and appeared depressed and out of spirits.<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 191.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 191-195.

<sup>177</sup> Mrs. A. Purbrook, unpublished account, IWM, 97/31/1.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*

Ramsgate's fate was far removed from Ilfracombe; the nature of the bombing emphasises in the strongest manner the diversity of the war experience in Britain.

Like so many other aspects of Great War, the novelty began to wear off. As we approach the end of 1915 the regularity and human cost of the Zeppelins became a source of unsettling fear. Alongside this came a growing indifference to the news of more casualties. 'How callous and indifferent we get', wrote Mrs Purbrook. 'After the first intelligence when we have said "Terrible! Shocking!" or some such adjective, we get of to our own various pursuits and think very little more about it.'<sup>180</sup> From the initial outrage over the 'baby-killers' of Scarborough, civilian casualties became simply another accepted evil of the war.

## VII – *Conclusion*

We began this chapter with the words of Owen and Sassoon. The influence of their writings, the sheer emotive power of their stories and images, has defined our perceptions of the war almost completely. The civilian is absent from the trenches, the defining site of our 'rolling narrative' of the Great War. Civilian casualties, their knowledge of fear and pain, is not accommodated in the polarised narratives of *them* and *us*. Civilians received their distress in a telegram rather than a shrapnel shell. The civilian casualties of the blitz in the second world further overshadowed the memory of the Zeppelin raids. Charles Bell's memoir of the First World War, written post-1945, almost apologises for his description of the bombings – 'they seemed severe at the time'.<sup>181</sup> Historians have given scant consideration to the effect of these raids, and their effect on the domestic experience of war.

The regional diversity of that experience is clear from the record of the areas affected. Kent, Essex, the East Coast and London itself suffered a great deal more than the rest of the country. Fear of an invasion that would sweep through northern Britain was replaced by the prospect of almost nightly raids across the

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<sup>180</sup> Purbrook, IWM, 97/31/1.

south and east. The raids brought a form of macabre celebrity to a town. Whereas other towns relied on incredulous rumours of spies and sabotage, these communities suffered outright attack. Scarborough, in particular, became a byword for German cruelty; the shelling of Whitby Abbey was talked of, rather unwisely, in the same terms as the destruction of Louvain. East Anglia boasted the first naval engagement and the first Zeppelin raid. We have seen how towns sought communal 'set-pieces' to articulate a war that was distant to them. With Scarborough and the rest, the war was made manifest. The communal expressions of mourning and philanthropy reflected the bonding nature of this community at war. The discontent at perceived culprits – the Admiralty, Churchill – forged a stronger sense of a community at war. The other side to this strengthening of identity was reflected in increased suspicion over strangers, and the use of violence in defining who now belonged.

In the aftermath of the war, it became customary for civilian casualties to be included on the war memorials.<sup>182</sup> Their names stood among the 'Glorious Dead'. As the first raids preceded the great slaughters of the Somme and Passchendaele, in many cases the first waves of collective grief for the raided towns were for civilians, not soldiers. It is clear that some non-combatant men, women and children did suffer fear, wounds and death. This fact renders the totality of civilian/combatant divide of Great War myth as much a product of the angry subaltern's pen, than as a reflection of the 'realities' of war.

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<sup>181</sup> C.G.H. Bell, unpublished account, IWM, 92/13/1.

<sup>182</sup> Thanks to Adrian Gregory for this point. See also A. Rowntree, *The History of Scarborough* (London, 1931).

## *Conclusion*

Studying such a short period of time raises problems with resolution, especially as the war continued for three subsequent years. Yet May 1915 is in many ways a convenient conclusion. The month that saw the Zeppelin raids spread across the South East, the Lusitania riots erupt across the country and the formation of the coalition government marks the consolidation of the war as a long term presence on the home front. The principal elements of the 'rolling narrative' were already in place. Kitchener's Army was in training and ready for action. The trenches stretched from the Channel to Switzerland. The link between both – the growing casualty lists – was a permanent fixture in the newspapers. Hopes that 'Business as Usual' would persist were long gone.

But this study warns against arbitrary dividing lines in history. August 1914 is too often treated as an end or a beginning. The response of contemporaries, whilst recognising that the moment was historic, was informed and shaped indelibly by looking back. We, as historians, must follow their gaze. Firstly, back to the previous war. The hysteria of 'mafficking' was a clear example of how not to act, a point emphasised by numerous press reports. Our photographs of cheering crowds – one of the defining images of the twentieth century – must be considered with the memory of the South African War in mind. For the summer of 1914 we have the prevailing sense of an idyll, of Sassoon foxhunting, Graves hiking in the Welsh hills and the timeless landscape of England waiting to be shattered. In August 1914 such an image was represented as a form of apathy, the 'man-in-the-street' untouched by the distant rumble of war clouds.

But more important in the early months of war was the belief that Britain was in crisis in the summer of 1914. The war offered an opportunity for redemption. In the Empire, fears of racial degeneration, coupled with the growing economic muscle of Germany and the United States, intimated that the supremacy of Britain was waning. At home, after the optimism of the Victorian era, was

Britain floundering on the rocks of Edwardian decadence? Divisions seemed apparent in every sphere. The amalgamation of trade unions gave rise to fears of continental uprisings and industrial strife. Suffragettes challenged the male space of politics, a robust and often violent locale. Most current on the outbreak of war was the Irish Home Rule controversy. The prospect of British soldiers refusing to fight for the Crown overturned all conventions.

Britain, then, was in need of 'regeneration' in August 1914. But this was only realised *after* the declaration of war. As the crisis loomed, public opinion lacked the bellicose enthusiasm for war remembered by David Lloyd George in the inter-war period. Across all political outlooks, pessimism and concern were the most frequent moods. Localities looked to the short-term impact on trade and business, and in most cases the outlook was not good. Crowds massing in the streets were nervous and anxious for news. Yet when the declaration of war came, a new community emerged.

The feeling of release, as these problems appeared to melt away in the hour of need, was enormous. It is here that we can locate 'war enthusiasm'. Internal, inward looking, a nation applauded itself. And in some cases the applause was justified. Producing a land army of hundreds of thousands men without conscription remains an incredible feat. The generosity of charitable giving produced an impressive amount of revenue, and must be appreciated, regardless of the failings in its distributions or the worthiness of its causes.

In politics the initial truce was too good to last as the demands of the war increased, but in the first months of war it was the clearest indication that the instability of summer 1914 appeared to be swept away. The economy, shaken by the immediate dislocation of war, regenerated trade as a provider for the army and navy. Industries in decline before the war were reinvigorated by government orders, and entered a period of boom. Kitchener's army symbolised the new unity, as men from all classes linked arms to defend the nation. That was one of the biggest revelations for contemporaries. Modern day conceptions of a golden 'lost generation' were unrecognisable to commentators in August 1914, who felt the 'race' was degenerating into ill-fed slum children and bent-backed clerks.

The appearance of these men in khaki symbolised the reinvented nation literally marching down the street.

There were adverse effects to the outbreak of war. Lack of news fostered rumour and mistrust. Voices other than the press and platform sought to define the new, reinvented nation. The 'boundary' of community was redrawn, and many found themselves on the wrong side of the divide. Collective violence was used symbolically to define these outsiders, leaving no doubt who belonged to the regenerated 'community-at-war'.

Civilians are ill served by the cultural perceptions of the Great War. They are usually portrayed as oblivious to the true conditions of war. Their hate is untainted by the comradeship of the battlefield. Yet civilians did suffer in the war. Some were killed or wounded directly from bombardments from the sea or air. The 'realities' of the war in the trenches was never a closed secret, and family members, acquaintances and even press reports revealed some of the truth. The reality of the casualty list implied the horrors to any remaining doubters.

We see in 1914-15 the transition from peace to war. The community was redrawn, presented with a new boundary, a new enemy. That boundary confronted the community with itself, requiring redefinition and regeneration. The desire to be included in that community was expressed in the profusion of display to prove that inclusion – the khaki uniform, the 'Flag Day' rosette, the mourning clothes. These symbols are amongst the most powerful elements of the 'rolling narrative', conserved in the rituals of remembrance.

Any study should look to new questions. What happened to our localities, as the 'banality' of war set in? Did the Belgian refugees in Keighley settle down to life in northern England? How did Frank Taylor Lockwood, and others like him, cope with the growing pressure and eventual reality of conscription? Did Mary Coules lose her brother at the front? A different phase demands a different study. We can close with the image of the cheering crowds. The dramatic irony of the modern gaze knows their future, anticipates the endless graveyards of Northern

France. The young men in the crowds did not. In accepting that we can begin to understand more deeply the way England went to war.

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